



T.O.D. Johnston

A Layman's Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew

*For knowledge & inspiration as
we follow Jesus Christ.*

T.O.D. Johnston's Commentary on Matthew

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T.O.D. Johnston's Commentary on Matthew
Preface

After reading many scholarly commentaries on different books of Scripture, it became my mental habit to sift through the minute discussions of individual words and/or phrases, and the quoting of various scholars of the past of many differing opinions, and center on the most logical and inspirational truths that remained. Thus I relied on the studied scholarship of those who had learned the original languages and had read all the previous scholars that had written to get the best possible understanding of Scripture that I, as a non-scholar, could. It seemed that most church members would not attempt to read scholarly works - but would benefit from their knowledge if presented in a plain and straightforward manner, the truths they had perceived. The following commentary is my attempt to do this. May God bless my efforts to the extent that they increase the understanding and faith of the reader.

T.O.D. Johnston
2005

Lesson I: Introduction

All early church writers record Matthew as the author of the first Gospel that has borne his name MATTHEW. Such writers include Papias (between 125 and 140 A.D.), Irenaeus (188-198), Origen (210-250 A.D.), and Eusebius (4th century).

Eusebius makes mention of the following: "Matthew, having first preached to the Hebrews, when he was going to leave Israel, wrote in his native language the Gospel according to himself, and thus, in writing, made up for the lack of his own presence."

The evidence of history points to the date of writing as between 63-66 A.D. in Israel. This Gospel has always been the first book of the New Testament. Major parts were written in Aramaic, the common language of the Jews at that time, and the language that Jesus spoke.

At some unknown point, Matthew's Gospel was translated into Greek. This would make it available to what was then recognized as the civilized world conquered by Alexander the Great and now rule by the Roman Empire. Alexander had forcibly spread Greek culture, which included its language, throughout his empire. Greek remained the necessary language of commerce and communication. As the Gospel spread beyond Israel, the translation into Greek was a necessity.

The Purpose: to convince the Jews that Jesus was the Messiah that the Old Testament promised and pointed to. This was firstly for the Jews, but also intended for the Gentiles. Matthew was a Jew writing for the Jews first - thus his Gospel is first. Matthew greatly emphasizes the work that Jesus came to earth to do - the will of the Father for man's redemption as prophesied in the Old Testament.

Chapter I: 1-17

The Genealogy of Jesus Christ.

- 1 The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.
- 2 ¶ Abraham begat Isaac; and Isaac begat Jacob; and Jacob begat Judah and his brethren;
- 3 and Judah begat Pharez and Zerah of Tamar; and Pharez begat Hezron; and Hezron begat Ram;
- 4 and Ram begat Ammin'adab; and Ammin'adab begat Nahshon; and Nahshon begat Salmon;
- 5 and Salmon begat Boaz of Rachab; and Boaz begat Obed of Ruth; and Obed begat Jesse;
- 6 and Jesse begat David the king.
- ¶ And David the king begat Solomon of her that had been the wife of Uri'ah;
- 7 and Solomon begat Rehobo'am; and Rehobo'am begat Abi'jah; and Abi'jah begat Asa;
- 8 and Asa begat Jehosh'aphat; and Jehosh'aphat begat Jeho'ram; and Jeho'ram begat Uzzi'ah;
- 9 and Uzzi'ah begat Jotham; and Jotham begat Ahaz; and Ahaz begat Hezeki'ah;
- 10 and Hezeki'ah begat Manas'seh; and Manas'seh begat Amon; and Amon begat Josi'ah;
- 11 and Josi'ah begat Jeconiah and his brethren, about the time they

Lesson I Continued

were carried away to Babylon.

12 ¶ And after they were brought to Babylon, Jeconiah begat She-al'ti-el; and She-al'ti-el begat Zerub'babel;

13 and Zerub'babel begat Abi'ud; and Abi'ud begat Eli'akim; and Eli'akim begat Azor;

14 and Azor begat Zadok; and Zadok begat Achim; and Achim begat Eli'ud;

15 and Eli'ud begat Ele-a'zar; and Ele-a'zar begat Matthan; and Matthan begat Jacob;

16 and Jacob begat Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ.

17 ¶ So all the generations from Abraham to David are fourteen generations; and from David until the carrying away into Babylon are fourteen generations; and from the carrying away into Babylon unto Christ are fourteen generations.

Matthew, mainly writing for Jewish readers, begins his Gospel with Christ's family tree, starting with Abraham. Luke begins with Adam, following the Godly line. Matthew follows descent from Abraham through Joseph (Mary's husband), the legal father, to Jesus. Luke begins with Jesus, through Mary, all the way back to Adam.

For the Jews, genealogy was consistently important. The conquest of Canaan divided up the land by family. This remained essential after the Babylonian captivity for a person's right to be a priest. A priestly descent had to be proved.

The general registration recorded by Luke (which was required by the Romans) had to be based on records of descent. Genealogical records in Scripture begin in Genesis - chapters 5, 10, 11, 22, 25, 29, 30, 35, 46. The records continue in Exodus, Numbers, Joshua, Ruth, I & II Samuel, I Kings, I & II Chronicles, Ezra, and Nehemiah.

Matthew later emphasizes in verses 18-25 that Joseph was not physically Jesus' father - only legally (which is pointed to in verse 16). Jesus is therefore both naturally and legally the descendant of David, having every right to call Himself the son of David, and the seed of the woman, the seed of Abraham - all fulfillments of prophecies about the promised Messiah - Son of David, Son of Man, Son of God.

Verse 1.

This verse serves as a title of the list of names. This is the record of the ancestry of Jesus Christ, son of David, son of Abraham.

The name Jesus. Our English form comes from Latin, which is from the Hellenized form of the late Hebrew Jeshua, which means 'he is salvation'. This is the personal name added to the official name Christ - the Greek translation of the Hebrew Messiah. This word includes the Anointed One (set apart, ordained, qualified by the Holy Spirit to accomplish the work of salvation for His people: Isaiah 61:1; Luke 4:18; Hebrew 1:9). This includes being God's True Prophet (Deuteronomy 18:15; Isaiah 55:4); our only High priest forever (Psalms 110:4; Hebrews 10:12,14); and our eternal King of Kings (Psalms 2:6; Zechariah 9:9). Two names; one person.

Matthew introduces his Gospel stating clearly that Jesus

Lesson I Continued

Christ is what His name means - the divinely anointed Savior, the One to fulfill the promises of God in prophecy, the true heir to the throne of David, the true seed of Abraham.

The genealogy includes 3 groups of fourteen. The first shows the origin of David's line. The second shows its rise and decline. The third shows that its importance is gone, but the line still continues. In Christ, the family is restored but also becomes even greater than the royalty and power seen in David's lifetime. Jesus will surpass all earthly glory as Messiah. Matthew places Jesus as the climax of three groups of fourteen.

Symbolism of numbers in the Bible is shown in many instances. Starting with 3 - the triune God, the triune universe (space, matter, time), as well as the beginning, middle, and end. All indicate fullness. The number 4 refers to fullness - the four winds, the four elements (earth, water, air / wind, fire). These two numbers add up to 7, the number widely used to designate perfection - beginning with the creation of the 7 day week. The number 14 is twice seven, therefore a totality ordained by God. Three of 14 is 42, or six of 7, compounded completeness. Introducing the seventh seven, therefore, equals perfection.

This suggests that Matthew reveals Jesus as the One Who completes and fulfills God's plan as recorded in the Old Testament, but also begins the plan prophesied in the Old Testament that will come to be known as the New Testament (Matthew 9:16,17; 26:28,29; John 3:34; Hebrews 9:15; 10:20; Revelation 21:5).

Matthew here records the lineage that shows Jesus is the legitimate seed of David as prophecy foretold. Joseph, His legal father, was a descendant of David. Thus, Jesus had the legal right to David's throne. From Mary, also a descendant of David, Jesus receives David's genetic flesh and blood.

They both knew that it was not the law or the flesh that gave them any right to claim any credit for Christ's coming into this world to save mankind. Joseph only adopted the boy. Mary was "the handmaid of the Lord." The Holy Spirit was the source. The glory Belongs to God alone! The very most blessed gift God ever gave to man. (Ephesians 2:8).

The Genealogy: the first fourteen.

Verse 2.

In writing primarily for Jews, it is most appropriate to begin with Abraham, the one called to be father of God's chosen people. The offspring listed were in the line to the Messiah. Matthew mentions some additional offspring (such as the brothers of Judah), but no reason is given. It is probable that the 12 brothers are included as the nation of Israel's founding tribes. Judah fathered Perez and Zerah, by Tamar (the daughter in law of Judah). Using trickery (dressing as a harlot), she conceived by him, bearing

Lesson I Continued

possibly twins; Perez and Zerah. Why else would Zerah be mentioned? No indication is recorded. The line continues with Hezron and Ram, of which nothing further is recorded.

Verse 4.

Amminadab, Nahshon, Salmon. They lived during the time of the Exodus from Egypt. Nahshon was the leader of Judah's tribe (Numbers 2:3). In marching, his tribe took the lead. It was Nahshon's son Salmon who married Rahab, who saved the two spies in Canaan, who were sent by Joshua.

Verses 5, 6a.

The son of Salmon and Rahab was Boaz, who was in turn the father of Obed, by Ruth. An identical genealogy is found in the Ruth 4:18-22. Obed fathered Jesse, who fathered David the king.

It has been observed that the amount of time that passed related to the names mentioned, some names in the line have not been recorded - each generation has not been included. The point of the genealogy was to record the line with the most important people named. This was not uncommon with other Biblical writings (cf. Ezra 7:3 with I Chronicles 6:7-9). It was also not uncommon for Jews during Jesus' day to claim to be sons of Abraham (by the flesh) without naming every generation from his time to theirs.

Verse 6b.

David fathered Solomon by the wife of Uriah. It is unique in genealogies that these lists contain women, foreigners (Tamar, Rahab, Ruth), and evil ones (Tamar, Joran, Ahaz, Amon etc.). All this shows that fleshly descent, even from Abraham, was full of sin - there was no claim to boast of before a righteous God. No man could save himself no matter his descent, or his own works.

Even David the king had greatly sinned by taking another man's wife, and having him killed. However, he had found mercy and forgiveness from God - looking to the Promised Messiah for salvation. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob had their sins also recorded in Scripture - driving home their need for a Savior.

Verses 7-11.

Solomon, Rehoboam, Abijah, Asa, Jehoshaphat, Joram, Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, Hezekiah, Manasseh, Amon, Josiah, Jechnoniah, and his brothers at the time of the deportation to Babylon.

The second group of 14, beginning with Solomon. He was revered for his wisdom, as well as the wealth and extent of his kingdom. However, he was not known for his spirituality. David was the measure because he turned to the Lord with true sorrow for his sins. After Solomon's death the kingdom was divided and declined politically, materially, and spiritually.

Lesson I Continued

All the other names recorded have ruled over the southern kingdom of Judah. Asa, Jehoshaphat, Uzziah, Jotham, Hezekiah, and Josiah all have a fairly good record. The opposite is true of the others, though Manasseh repented before he died. With Jechoniah, the kingdom fell.

Between Joram and Uzziah, three names are left out: Ahaziah, Joash, and Amaziah. As mentioned earlier, Matthew is not concerned with a complete chronology, but listing the most important members of the male line that leads to Christ. It always points to man's need of a Savior.

God's purpose was to keep a remnant that were faithful and devoted to Him. This was accomplished through separation from the rest of the people. Solomon's reign ended up including many gods from foreign lands. This began to corrupt the whole kingdom. Thus the separation - Judah kept the Holy Temple and true worship. At a later point, the Kingdom of Judah also became corrupt. Then, the separation by the Assyrians, later the Babylonians. There the people known as Jews stood fast for their religion and were a witness to the Gentiles of the One True God.

Also, during these times, we hear the voices of the true prophets that proclaimed the people's sin and their need of the Promised Savior that God would provide. Isaiah, Jeremiah, Hosea, Micah, pronounced many Messianic prophecies: Isaiah 7:14; 8:8; 9:1,2,6; 11:1-10; 42:1-7; 50:4-9; 52:13-53; 61:1-3; 62:11; Jeremiah 23:5; 31:15; Hosiah 11:1; Micah 5:2.

The 70 years of Babylonian captivity began with false hope of a fast return. The Temple still stood in Jerusalem. Then in 586 B.C., Jerusalem fell and the Temple was destroyed. Most of the people were taken away, and hope was lost. Not until near the end of the 70 years did hope return.

Verse 12.

The third list of 14 now begins. It has been noted that Jechoniah ended the list of the second 14 - as the last king of the captive kingdom of Judah. He ended up in prison, as good as dead (II Kings 24:8-12). However, later he is freed from prison and is treated kindly by the king of Babylon (II Kings 27:27-30). He had a son that continued the Messianic line - Shealtiel. His other son, Zerubbabel, was appointed governor when Cyrus (the Persian emperor) allowed a remnant of Jews to return to Jerusalem (Ezra 1). Babylon had been conquered by Persia in 535 B.C.

Joshua was the head of the priesthood. For the prophecies concerning the birth of the Messiah being in Bethlehem, it was necessary for the Jews to be back in their land. The Messianic line must also be there, the Temple rebuilt, that Joseph and Mary will be on that holy soil at the appointed time. We see the hand of God guiding all of these events through history that prepare for and lead

Lesson I Continued

up to the Incarnation of His Son, to be our Savior.

Verses 13-16a. The list continues.

Zerubbabel, Abiud, Eliakim, Azor, Zadok, Achum, Eliud, Eleazer, Natthan, Jacob, Joseph. This covered the time of Medo-Persian rule (536-333 B.C.). Then the Greeks, a short time under the Egyptians (333-200 B.C.). A short period under Syria - then the Maccabean revolt rule (200-63 B.C.). Then, the Roman Empire took over.

Most of the names are not mentioned elsewhere in Scripture, mainly because this time period was after the close of the Old Testament. Again, it appears that Matthew has abbreviated his list. For the same time period, Luke lists 23 names, whereas Matthew limits his to 14. There is ample evidence in the Old and New Testaments, as well as secular history, that accurate records were kept throughout their generations (cf. Luke 1:5; Romans 11:1; Philemon 3:5; Josephus - The Life I.6; Against Apaon (???) I.30).

Verse 16b.

The husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, Who is called Christ. Matthew makes a clear distinction about Joseph. All other names were connected by "begot". Here, the word is not used - which indicates that Joseph had no part in begetting Jesus. Mary was uniquely the mother of Jesus. Joseph was her husband, which he writes about later. Joseph became the legal father.

Verse 17.

This summarizes the ancestry of Jesus.

Next lesson - the story of the birth.

Lesson II

Matthew 1:18-25. The Savior's Birth.

18 ¶ Now the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise: When as his mother Mary was espoused to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Ghost.

19 Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not willing to make her a public example, was minded to put her away privily.

20 But while he thought on these things, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream, saying, Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost.

21 And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins

22 Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying,

23 Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Imman'u-el, which being interpreted is, God with us.

24 Then Joseph being raised from sleep did as the angel of the Lord had bidden him, and took unto him his wife:

25 and knew her not till she had brought forth her firstborn son: and he called his name JESUS.

Verse 18.

The narrative is recorded from Joseph's point of view, and it begins shortly after the betrothal. This was a legal ceremony before witnesses, where bride and bridegroom pledged their troth to each other. They were considered and here called husband and wife. There was a period of time before they lived together and consummated the marriage. It was during this interval that Mary discovered she was pregnant. She knew immediately that the promise that had been delivered to her by the angel Gabriel had indeed come to pass. Though a virgin, she did conceive by the Holy Spirit, the child of promise.

Verse 19.

According to the Old Testament law, unfaithfulness by a betrothed woman was punishable by death. Joseph became aware that Mary was pregnant. He wished no harm to come to her. He planned to divorce her quietly so that she would not be publicly disgraced. Joseph had drawn the obvious conclusion that she had been unfaithful to him. He, being a righteous man, could not accept her as wife.

He had two choices. The death penalty was no longer practice. He could bring a lawsuit against her, and thus publicly disgrace her. On the other hand, he could give her a bill of divorcement - dismissing her quietly. Even though he chose the latter, it was taking him some time to think it over, before being able to follow through.

Verse 20.

It was during this time that an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream. The angel calls him Joseph, son of David, thus reminding him of his heritage. He is a legal heir of David and also passes this on to Jesus as his own legal heir. This reminds us of the

Lesson II continued

genealogy Matthew began his Gospel with.

The angel insists that he not hesitate to take Mary, his wife, into his home, for indeed she has not been unfaithful to him. The child she carried was conceived by the Holy Spirit. This was a unique event in human history, and could only be told by an angel of the Lord. Otherwise, Joseph would never have believed Mary saying it. We can only imagine his relief and joy that Mary had been faithful. He could take her home as his wife, and take care of her, as well as the special child from God she carried.

Verse 21.

The angel goes on to direct Joseph to name Him Jesus, a name with a special meaning: He will save his people from their sins. Mary had also been told to name the child Jesus (Luke 1:31).

Sins include thought, word, and deed - omission and commission, all coming from our sinful nature. Only the sinless One could ever save another by His sacrifice on the cross. There are a great many Scriptures in both the Old and New Testaments that emphasize salvation as a work of God alone: Genesis 49:18; II Kings 19:15-19; II Chronicles 14:11; 20:5-12; Isaiah 12:12; Jeremiah 3:23; Daniel 4:35; Micah 7:7; Zechariah 4:6; Matthew 19:28; 28:18; Luke 12:32; John 14:6; Acts 4:12; Ephesians 2:8; Philemon 2:12; Revelation 1:18; 3:7; 5:9; 19:1,6,16. These are just a few. The child must be named Jesus, meaning Savior.

Verses 22,23.

That this is fulfillment of prophecy is here explained. It is specifically noted that it was God, speaking through the prophet (not named), that made this promise of the Messiah which was now to be fulfilled in the birth of Jesus. (Isaiah 7:14).

The name Emmanuel - "God with us" - refers to the character of the child and a testimony of His deity. The Word became flesh, and dwelt among us. Only a sinless person could die for other's sins. Only a person without a sinful nature (inherited from Adam) could live without sin. Conceived by the Holy Spirit, and born of a virgin, only Jesus fulfilled these requirements.

Verses 24,25.

This concludes the story begun in verse 18 where they did not live together. Now, Joseph takes her into his home as the angel of the Lord directed him. It is stated that they had no sexual relations until after she gave birth to a son, and they agreed to name Him Jesus. The statement gives no reason. It was by their choice - possibly by their holy respect for the child she was bearing. Possibly also this would make it impossible that anyone could accuse Joseph of being the father.

Other Scriptures mention Jesus as Mary's firstborn. We are also told about brothers and sisters of Jesus several times in all four Gospels and acts (Matthew 12:46,47; Mark 3:31,32; Luke 8:19,20; John 7:3,5,10; Acts 1:14). It is only natural for them to have their own children. This would in no way lessen the uniqueness of Jesus' birth. Only Catholics require her to remain a virgin.

Lesson II continued

Matthew 2:1-3. The Wise Men.

1 Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem,
2 saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him.
3 When Herod the king had heard these things, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him.

Verse 1.

Jesus is the rightful heir to David's throne. It is appropriate that both Gentiles and Jews pay Him homage. This is the first mention that the place of Jesus' birth was Bethlehem of Judea; the city of David. It is also mentioned that Herod was the King. Jesus was born a short time before Herod's death. According to historical records, Herod died in March or April of 4 B.C.

At some unspecified time after Jesus' birth, wise men from the east arrived in Jerusalem. Though no further information is included about their country of origin, several things can be surmised. The term "wise men", or "magi" as some translate it, was used to identify men who studied the stars - astronomers. They were found in Babylon (mentioned by Daniel), and were considered the priestly caste.

These "wise men" were deeply concerned with religion and related fields of human behavior and belief. This included the study of the movement of the heavenly bodies and how they might influence events on earth. Signs, portents, and omens come to mind. They also computed the seasons, time measure, and the calendar.

It can also be surmised that they had had contact with Jews in the period, around 8th to 6th centuries B.C., when the Medes and Persians ruled the area and took many back to their own country. More is known about Daniel and his friends, and their great influence among the Babylonians during their captivity. This would include some people accepting belief in one true God, emphasis on good over evil, and the hope of Messiah.

As a result, they considered it important to recognize the new star (when it appeared) as the Messiah's. Thus, their trip to Judea to pay homage to the newborn king of the Jews. The number of the wise men is not mentioned. Some have suggested that because there were three gifts, there must have been one bringing each gift. Whatever the number, they arrive in Jerusalem with one question: they have seen His star in its rising and have come to worship Him - so where is He, the newborn king of the Jews?

They have no doubt about the birth of the one to be called king of the Jews. They only have to find out where he is. They suddenly arrived, asking the question of whoever they met. This quickly arouses the populace to great concern and confusion.

Lesson II continued

As to the star these men saw - there have been several possible explanations: the planet Jupiter, or its conjunction with Saturn, a comet, an illusion, or a guiding star within the heart.

What we do know is that it was an actual phenomenon. God provided what these watchers of the stars saw. It was a unique creation with that single purpose. Beyond that is idle speculation.

That they recognized it as "his star" could have been the result of an interpretation of Daniel 9:25. The greatest emphasis centers on the purpose of their journey - they have come to worship Him. No time need be wasted about all the unknown incidental details.

Verse 3.

When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him. From what is known about Herod, it was a natural response to feel threatened by the mention of another king of the Jews. He had fought for years to receive this title from Rome. Would even the suggestion of another king cause those fanatics that hated him to riot and try to overthrow his cruel and despotic reign. From what is mentioned, the people of Jerusalem were also alarmed and frightened - not by the magi or their question. What they truly feared was Herod's reaction to what he would consider a threat to His power. They had already seen what vengeful actions he was capable of.

It might be helpful to take a short look at this man. He has been referred to as Herod the Great. Earlier there had been many rulers under Rome, in various regions of Palestine. There had been much fighting, and many thousands of Jews were killed. In 63 B.C., Roman armies captured Jerusalem to settle wars between two factions trying to rule. To settle the issue, the Romans chose Antipater, governor of Edom, as the procurator of Judea. He then was allowed to appoint his son Herod as tetrarch of Galilee in 47 B.C.

In 40 B.C., the Parthians invaded and civil war broke out. Herod fled to Rome where he was granted being king of Judea. He was given an army to subdue the area, and he finally succeeded in 37 B.C. Emperor Augustus gave him all of Palestine after that. Struggles against his enemies continued throughout his reign. He was 70 when he died in 4 B.C.

Herod was not born a Jew, but instead in Edom. When that area had been conquered by John Hyrcanus, the Jewish religion was instituted there. Some mention is made that Herod practiced the Jewish religion. He is, however, more devoted to his worldly power, pomp, and circumstance, wealth, and all the amenities that Hellenistic culture could provide. According to the contemporary Jewish historian, Josephus, Herod was a strong and capable ruler, as well as shrewd, crafty, and cruel. He was a well-practiced public speaker and a decisive military leader. He was also efficient in his diplomacy with Rome and collecting tribute for the Empire.

He was also a great builder. Outside Jerusalem, he built an

Lesson II continued

amphitheater for drama, and a hippodrome for athletic events. Neither of these were accepted or appreciated by devout Jews, but had a negative effect. He also built himself a fancy large palace to the western side of the city.

In order to gain popularity, Herod remodeled the 2nd Temple, Zerubbabel's, originally built in 516 B.C., 70 years after Solomon's Temple was destroyed. Herod began in 19 B.C., but it was not completed until long after his death. Great progress had been made by the time Jesus and his disciples had frequented it 30 some years after Herod died.

He also had at least 10 wives and 12 children during his life. As he grew older, he saw anyone who had any claim to power as a threat, especially anyone who was in the royal line in his own family. By the time the wise men visited Jerusalem, he had had many in his own family executed. This included one wife, a brother in law, and three of his own sons, as well as many others he suspected of plotting against him (such as a high priest or one of his generals). His suspicion and cruelty increased almost to paranoia.

It has been suggested that this visit happened in the last year of Herod's life. All this leads up to the actions he takes as a result of these wise men looking for the newborn king of the Jews.

Next lesson - what Herod does.
Matthew 2:4-12.

Lesson III

The Immediate Action of Herod

Matthew 2:4-12. The Wise Men Find the Child.

4 And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he demanded of them where Christ should be born.
 5 And they said unto him, In Bethlehem of Judea: for thus it is written by the prophet,
 6 And thou Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, art not the least among the princes of Judah: for out of thee shall come a Governor, that shall rule my people Israel.
 7 ¶ Then Herod, when he had privily called the wise men, inquired of them diligently what time the star appeared.
 8 And he sent them to Bethlehem, and said, Go and search diligently for the young child; and when ye have found him, bring me word again, that I may come and worship him also.
 9 When they had heard the king, they departed; and, lo, the star, which they saw in the east, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was.
 10 When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy.
 11 And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshipped him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts; gold, and frankincense, and myrrh.
 12 And being warned of God in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed into their own country another way.

Verse 4.

Now having heard the wise men, Herod calls together all the chief priests, and scribes of the Jews to tell him what the Scriptures say about where the Messiah was to be born. Herod knew enough about the Jews that their hope of deliverance was in the Messiah who would be also the king of the Jews - they are the same person. Herod knew enough that somewhere in the Old Testament the birthplace was prophesied.

Verses 5,6.

The experts in the Scripture told him that they had the answer: Bethlehem of Judea (from Micah 5:2) -
 By no means least of the princes of Judah;
 For out of you there shall come a ruler
 Who will shepherd my people Israel.

Though small and of little importance in comparison to the larger cities, it will be of the greatest value because the promised Messiah is to be born there. Verse 6 also reflects II Samuel 5:2 where David is called upon to be the shepherd of God's people, Israel. David's life reveals several things that prefigure the Christ's life and death. First, he was born in Bethlehem, descended from Abraham. Second, his name, meaning "being beloved". Third, being God's anointed to a royal position. Fourth, a struggle of humiliation and defeat that resulted in glorious exaltation.

The term shepherd used to describe the manner of his rule showed one of leadership with caring for his people's welfare. This

Lesson III Continued

would be in sharp contrast to every other king's manner and motivation about ruling, especially Herod's. At no point does concern for the people enter his mind.

Verse 7.

Herod then secretly requests to meet with the wise men, to gain as much information as possible from them. Rather than ask about how old the child would be, he deviously pretends to be intrigued by the wise men's special interest - study of the stars. He questions them about the first appearance of the special star. However, his purpose was the opposite of theirs - he wanted to see to it that the child was destroyed.

Verse 8.

He sends them off to Bethlehem. However, when they have carefully searched and found the child, they are to report back to him about the location. He adds, cunningly, that his only motive was also theirs - that he may also come and worship Him.

Verse 9.

After the interview with Herod, they went toward Bethlehem, then they became aware that the star they had seen in their own country (in its rising) was now going ahead of them. This was no fixed star - it was moving toward Bethlehem. No further explanation is given. When they arrived in Bethlehem, the star stopped moving and stood still over a house. The very dwelling place where the long-sought child was. That God created a light to guide these wise men to His Messiah seems perfectly proper and logical - requiring no attempts at some other - or possibly pseudo-scientific - explanation (though many can be found).

Verse 10.

Literally - at sight of the now motionless star over the house, "they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy!" The whole purpose of the journey, their hearts' desire, was at hand. Only the true God of heaven and earth could have guided them here. Now they are to see the miracle child also provided by God. What greater joy could there be!

Verse 11.

They enter the house and see the child. Mary was holding Him. They cast themselves to the ground and worshipped Him. After worshipping the child for a proper amount of time, they bring forth what gifts they have brought unto this special purpose: gold, frankincense, and myrrh. This also shows their wealth and implies a journey with beasts of burden. There were possibly attendants, and provisions for the complete journey. Add to that their generous willingness to travel a difficult and long journey, bearing expensive gifts.

All of this was to see, worship, and give to a recently born child in a country different in every way from their own. Yet, through supernatural means, they have come this far in order to worship and give their valuable gifts, brought in treasure chests.

Lesson III Continued

The gold was valuable and would serve well the needs of the holy family (especially when they traveled to Egypt). This was in honor of the value and royalty of the child, born to be king of the Jews, though He was born in the most unnoticed and humble of circumstances, as seen from the worldly point of view.

Frankincense was a specific form of incense made from the juice of the Bosivellia tree found in Southern Arabia and Somalia (East Africa) . In Scripture, it is most often mentioned with reference to meal offerings only for Jehovah. The fragrant smoke that rose toward heaven was symbolic of the prayers and thanksgiving offered by the priests and the people to their God. Here it is given to the Son of God.

Myrrh was made from the wood of the Balsamodendron tree in Arabia. It was generally used as a perfume, especially in wedding ceremonies, and finally as part of the preparation of a body for burial. This was presented to make the Child's life more pleasant, and also made provision for the care of His body, when He died by His own choice for us.

This event shows that God provides knowledge of His salvation even to Gentiles. This record written for Jews by Matthew would show the universal offer of His salvation, to every race, nationality, religion, or creed. All are sinners and need a Savior.

Verse 12.

God knew Herod's heart and warned the wise men in a dream not to return to him, so they took a different route in returning to their home country. The revelation of God in a dream is often mentioned in Scripture. Though no date is recorded, later it is mentioned that Herod intended to kill all children 2 years and younger, that the wise men had seen the rising star 2 years previously.

How long the journey took, and how soon they began after seeing the star, is not mentioned. The fact that they see the child in a house, shows some period of time has passed since the birth in the stable. That is all we are told, so any attempt to fix an age or date remains speculation.

Matthew 2:13-15. Flight to Egypt.

13 ¶ And when they were departed, behold, the angel of the Lord appeareth to Joseph in a dream, saying, Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and flee into Egypt, and be thou there until I bring thee word: for Herod will seek the young child to destroy him.
14 When he arose, he took the young child and his mother by night, and departed into Egypt:

15 and was there until the death of Herod: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Out of Egypt

Lesson III Continued

have I called my son.

Verse 13.

After the wise men left the holy family, it was only a brief time when an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph. He warned Joseph of the murderous plan of Herod to have the child killed. He must immediately make preparations to take the child and his mother to Egypt as quickly as possible.

Though nothing is mentioned about Joseph and Mary's reaction to the wise men's visit, we can imagine that it greatly encouraged them. It also confirmed the promises of the angels of God that appeared to them both before the child's birth, as well as the shepherds that came shortly after the birth, praising God in the highest for the gift of God.

Here again, God is providing for and protecting them. That they had to leave their nation as the result of the king's fear and cruelty was a further humiliation to the holy child. Why Egypt? It was not too far away, and was outside of Herod's domain. There were a great many Jews living there (Jeremiah 43:7; 44:1; Acts 2:10), and they would be accepted. It is not impossible that they had relations or acquaintances there. And finally the fulfillment of Hosea 11:1.

Verse 14.

Joseph obeyed the Lord, and set off for Egypt. In spite of the darkness, the difficulty of getting mother and child ready, and preparing all the necessities to be carried, it was all done without question. No details of the journey or the stay are recorded - not even the length of time. The best we can surmise is that Jesus was born within the last two years of Herod's life and reign.

Verse 15.

The family stayed in Egypt until after Herod died. The quoting of Hosea's prophecy is the emphasis that this stay and call to return had been in God's plan as revealed in this prophecy. It also mirrors God's dealing with Israel. In Exodus 4:22, God calls Israel His son, His firstborn. Pharaoh, as king of Egypt, tried to destroy Israel. God had protected them there, and brought them out safely. Israel was the nation and people through whom the Messiah was to come.

God again teaches that His plans are from everlasting, and that he carries them out - even when these plans include two events that are centuries apart. One event prepares for the other. This leaves no thoughtful person to possibly call their occurrence anything except the obvious and conscious outworking of God's hand in human history - and specifically in bringing forth His salvation through Jesus.

"That which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet might

Lesson III Continued

be fulfilled, "Out of Egypt I called my son."

Matthew 2:16-18. Slaughter of the Infants.

16 ¶ Then Herod, when he saw that he was mocked of the wise men, was exceeding wroth, and sent forth, and slew all the children that were in Bethlehem, and in all the coasts thereof, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had diligently inquired of the wise men.

17 Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by Jeremiah the prophet, saying,

18 In Ramah was there a voice heard, lamentation, and weeping, and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children, and would not be comforted, because they are not.

Verse 16.

When Herod saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, he became furious. He was determined to carry out his plan of destruction of any threat to his power. Rather than send spies of his own to search out the child (which would take too long, and have an uncertain outcome), he decided to kill all the infants in Bethlehem, and even the surrounding countryside. There was no possibility the child would be able to escape. All would be killed, completely without warning, and as soon as possible.

The age of 2 years and younger was figured from what he had learned from the wise men, concerning when they first saw the unique star. By killing every infant, it could be done quickly, without bothering with details, such as foreigners or visitors, family, position, or please and outcries from the parents. Herod at no time thought that God was at work in these events: the birth, the wise men, their not returning to him, that God would provide a way of escape from his fear, hatred and cruelty in seeking the Child's death. All because he considered it a threat to his despotic reign that there was a baby called king of the Jews by some wise men.

His soldiers carried out the slaughter of all the boy infants 2 years and younger. Thankfully, no details of exactly how this was carried out are mentioned. It must have been horrific and bloody. It must have also been the worst possible nightmare for the parents and their families.

Though Herod specifies 2 years and younger does not mean that he definitely thought the child was 2. No exact date was known, and if he thought the boy was around 1 year old, he would include those up to 2 to make certain there was no margin for error. It might also be remembered that he had had no qualms having his own sons killed, so he certainly would not hesitate to have other people's sons killed as well. From what is known about the size and population of

Lesson III Continued

Bethlehem and vicinity during that time, it is likely that about 15 to 20 infants were killed by Herod's soldiers.

Verses 17,18.

Another prophecy fulfilled - Jeremiah 31:15. Ramah refers to a place about 5 miles from Jerusalem. This was where foreign conquerors brought those defeated who were to be deported. It was the approximate border of the divided kingdoms: Israel, of the ten tribes, and Judah of the two tribes (Judah and Benjamin). This place witnessed the taking away of the children of both kingdoms. Therefore, it was a place of wailing and loud lamentation.

Rachel is then described as looking down on what is taking place there. She also begins to weep, for these are her descendants - either killed or taken away to unknown foreign destinations, to become lost among the nations. Matthew pictures Rachel again, having another cause to weep - the slaughter of these children of Bethlehem, and this time by a foreigner from Edom - Herod.

That is not the end of the story, however. God always preserved His remnant. Just as in the former times, a remnant would return to rebuild and serve the Lord. They would also carry the Holy Scriptures and the promises of the Branch of Righteousness who will execute justice in the land (Jeremiah 31:38; 33:14,15). Here also those in exile will return, and bring that very Branch of Righteousness with them, the future ruler, born in Bethlehem. Rachel may now be comforted, as the consolation of Israel, indeed for the whole world, has come.

Next, the Return from Egypt.

Lesson IV

Matthew 2:19-23. Return from Egypt to Nazareth.

19 ¶ But when Herod was dead, behold, an angel of the Lord appeareth in a dream to Joseph in Egypt,
 20 saying, Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and go into the land of Israel: for they are dead which sought the young child's life.
 21 And he arose, and took the young child and his mother, and came into the land of Israel.
 22 But when he heard that Archela'us did reign in Judea in the room of his father Herod, he was afraid to go thither: notwithstanding, being warned of God in a dream, he turned aside into the parts of Galilee:
 23 and he came and dwelt in a city called Nazareth: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets, He shall be called a Nazarene.

Verses 19,20.

Herod was now dead, and again, the time of his death was not mentioned. However, it appears that it happened only a short period since the holy family had been in Egypt - probably under two years. Josephus (the Jewish historian) records a great deal about Herod's various illnesses and their complications that did at last kill the tyrant. There has been speculation concerning the historian's descriptions and what they might mean in modern medical terms.

One thing that pointed to his cruelty was his fear that because of the Jews' hatred there would be a celebration rather than mourning at his death. To prevent this, he ordered that all the important men of the nation would be killed at his death. Thus, there would be mourning - if not for him, at least because of him. Once he died, the massacre was not carried out.

A few days before his death, Herod did have his oldest son Antipater executed. The son had been involved in a plot to poison the king. Josephus' final pronouncement about Herod: "He was a man of great barbarity toward all men equally."

The angel of the lord appeared to Joseph in a dream, as promised in the previous dream (see Matthew 2:13). The angel's message is that it is safe to return to Israel, as those seeking the little child's life are dead. No specific location is mentioned.

Verse 21.

Joseph obeys. He got up from his dream and promptly makes whatever preparations necessary and proceeds on the journey back with the little child and His mother to Israel.

It appears that he originally planned to re-settle in Bethlehem, where he certainly had relatives and friends, and opportunity to work. They were living in a house there, before they left for Egypt. The nearness to Jerusalem, the center of religious life in the nation, was also a consideration.

Verse 22.

Upon learning that one of Herod's sons, Archelaus, was ruler of Judea, some fear remained with Joseph. He was also warned in a

Lesson IV Continued

dream not to stay there, but to go on north to Galilee. It was not part of Judea, and therefore not under Archelaus' control.

Herod Antipas, brother to Archelaus, was designated tetrarch of Galilee and Perea, Archelaus became ethnarch of Judea, Samaria and Idumea; Philip (another son of Herod) was appointed tetrarch of the northern territories - the best known were Iturea and Trachonitis. Ethnarch was the highest position.

Archelaus turned out to be cruel. Herod had two well liked teachers of the law killed for trying to get the giant golden eagle above the main temple gate destroyed. This had been made and placed there by Herod. It was a sacrilege to the Jews, as the eagle was a Roman symbol.

After Herod's passing, the Passover came and a great riot broke out in response to the two teachers' death. Archelaus, in putting down the rebellion, had over 3 thousand killed, among whom were many pilgrims attending the Passover. He was finally deposed in A.D. 6, the 9th year of his reign. Rome appointed governors from then on. The only important one was Pontius Pilate.

Verse 23.

Once in Galilee, they settled in a town called Nazareth. This becomes another fulfillment of prophecy, for Jesus would be called a Nazarene. By divine direction, the holy family returns to their former home. Over time, the birth in Bethlehem is forgotten. Jesus will be considered of no account because of the lack of respect or esteem for the small unimportant town of Nazareth.

A Nazarene or Nazirite was a person specially consecrated to God. See Numbers 6 and Isaiah 11:1. Many other Old Testament passages emphasize that Messiah will not come from an important and wealthy family, or a large important city, but the opposite - humble parents and place. Of no importance by the world's measure, one to be despised and rejected by men.

Matthew 3:1-7. John the Baptist.

1 In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judea,

2 and saying, Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

3 For this is he that was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.

4 And the same John had his raiment of camel's hair, and a leathern girdle about his loins; and his meat was locusts and wild honey.

5 Then went out to him Jerusalem, and all Judea, and all the region round about Jordan,

6 and were baptized of him in Jordan, confessing their sins.

7 ¶ But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees come to his baptism, he said unto them, O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?

Jesus has been introduced as king of the Jews, being worshipped by the wise men. Now we have the king's herald, making the way, announcing His coming, John the Baptist.

Lesson IV Continued

Verse 1.

Since Jesus was about 30 years of age when He began His ministry (Luke 3:23), and John was about 6 months older, it can be estimated that John began preaching at some time during the summer of 26 A.D. Jesus then began His ministry a few months later (5 to 7 months), as late as the beginning of 27 A.D.

Luke gives us the details of the Baptist's birth - a miracle for the old priest Zechariah and his wife Elizabeth. When he grew up, he seemed to suddenly appear, preaching in the wilderness of Judea. This area was known as rolling badlands. There was hill country to the west, as well as the Dead Sea and lower Jordan valley to the east. In the north, the Jabbok flowed into the Jordan. It was an area of barren, chalky soil, littered with stones and rocks of all sizes. Occasionally brushwood was seen, a dwelling place of snakes (verse 7). Both banks of the Jordan were included.

Verse 2.

John's message: "Be converted!" His words go further than just repentance - which can be based on emotion, a feeling bad for what one has done. It may be considered the necessary but negative side of what is called for. The other side calls for the mind and will making a choice, a positive choice to turn one's life around. In this way, one can live to bring glory to God, and to bear fruit.

Though John called for baptism, it was never considered more than the outward representation of the inward change (or conversion). John adds the words, "for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." This heralded the beginning of God's reign in men's hearts as part of the Messianic prophecies. God was going to greatly bless those Who by faith accepted His Son.

Verse 3.

Matthew now quotes Isaiah 40:3-5.

The voice of one crying in the wilderness;
Make ready the way of the Lord;
Make straight His paths.

Matthew, John himself, and Jesus agree with this interpretation. John says (in John 1:23), "I am the voice." Jesus says so in Matthew 11:10.

This was John's assigned task even before he was born (Luke 1:17; Luke 1:76,77; Malachi 3:1). He was not only to herald Messiah's coming, but also to urge the people to turn from their sinful way, and towards God - to change their minds and hearts towards Him, to be ready to accept what God had prepared for their salvation.

The actual wilderness, its dry barrenness was a dramatic and obvious figure of the condition of the multitudes' hearts toward God. Barren of holiness, of unselfishness, of forgiveness, and of honor to

Lesson IV Continued

God was the wilderness of men's hearts. It was through this wilderness that a path to God must be made: the crooked made straight; the obstacles must be cleared away.

Verse 4.

This verse gives a brief description of the general manner of John's life. A tunic of camel's hair was considered rough, inexpensive, but durable, especially for the rough country John frequented. This also has been described as fitting for the simple and straightforward message he preached. In Matthew 1:8, Jesus remarks that John did not wear fancy or expensive clothes. John girded his waist with a leather belt - this would make walking and baptizing easier.

John's sustenance was also simple - whatever could be found in the wilderness. Wild honey was well known, and found under or in crevices of larger rocks. This was mentioned in the stories of Samson (Judges 14:8,9,18) and Jonathan (I Samuel 14:25,26,29). Locusts were also included. Traditionally the wings and legs would be removed, the body roasted, and possibly lightly salted: good protein. See Leviticus 11:12.

This does not mean that John never ate anything else, but it does emphasize this simple diet in direct contrast to the common self indulgence, focus on sumptuous eating, fancy clothing, among other things. All of these are evidence of most people's focus on their selfishness and dependence on wealth for security.

John's call from the wilderness was to break through to the real condition of men's hearts - that from God's point of view, they were headed for judgment and condemnation.

Verse 5.

The effect: great numbers from Jerusalem, all Judea, and both sides of the Jordan went out to see and hear him. They accepted him as a prophet, as he called upon them to turn to God.

Verse 6.

Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the river Jordan. Baptism was the outward visible and public sign of their repentance and turning to God in acceptance of His forgiveness, of salvation, thereby becoming His subjects of the kingdom of heaven.

Baptism had been traditionally used by the Jews to formally bring a Gentile proselyte (one converting to Judaism) into the fold. This was done once. John's baptism emphasized just as radical a change of life was necessary for Jews who had strayed far from a godly life. Baptism is the outward and once-for-all public sign of that inward change of mind, heart and will.

Lesson IV Continued

Verse 7.

The religious leaders: Pharisees and Sadducees, he calls offspring of vipers (poisonous snakes).

A brief history of these parties: first the Pharisees. It is generally accepted that they were descendants of the Hasidhim - the Pious. They were centered on keeping strict religious practices according to the laws of Moses. They had therefore strongly opposed the influence and adoption of Greek customs and culture. The word Pharisees means Separatists. By the time of Jesus' and John's ministries, this group had separated itself from the heathen (Gentiles), from publicans and sinners, and also from the general Jewish multitudes whom they labeled "those who do not know the law" (John 7:49). They tried to avoid even being near such people, believing they would be defiled or contaminated by such association, and they would consider themselves ceremonially unclean.

The Sadducees: they claimed descent from the priestly line of Zadok (in the Greek translation of the Old Testament - Sadok). He had shared the high priest's office with Abiathar when David was king, and later he was the only high priest under Solomon (I Kings 1:35; 2:35). The high priesthood had continued to be held by his descendants until the time of the Maccabees. They, however, did not resist the influence and adoption of Greek culture, called Hellenism. Though called the sacerdotal party, they did not believe in bodily resurrection, angels, or spirits. They believed that the soul died when the body died. They held to the Laws of Moses especially as they related to Temple rituals and worship.

On the other hand, the Pharisees, in addition to the Old Testament, paid great respect and reverence to the oral traditions of the elders. They included so many interpretations, additions, and detailed stipulations concerning the written law, that they obscured the intent of God in giving the law.

The two parties did agree in one way - both wanted to keep their status secure. Among the Sadducees, many were wealthy from the commerce carried on within the Temple grounds. Many were landowners as well. The Pharisees were working very diligently to be the ones that earned their ticket to heaven, through their painstaking adherence to every law and tradition. Their teaching also emphasized this, which loaded an impossible burden upon the religious people that wanted to serve God.

When Jesus spoke to the people about God's love and salvation, He was rejected by both groups, who ended up securing His condemnation and death. John describes them as desert snakes, sneaky and dangerous. A viper would lie among brush found in those regions. When someone would reach to pick up some branches, the viper would quickly strike and hold on to its victim (cf. Acts 28:3). Possibly he also refers back to the deceiver in the garden.

John asks, "Who warned you to escape the approaching

Lesson IV Continued

outpouring of wrath?" He is suggesting that they must have come to some realization that they were under condemnation, and were guilty before God. Do they now really seek conversion, or are they just looking for an easy way out? Were they seeking John's baptism as a rite to perform to avoid God's wrath?

John makes plain what is necessary. The only escape from wrath is conversion. The other side of conversion - bearing fruit - is continued in the next lesson.

Lesson V

Matthew 3:8-12. John's Preaching.

8 Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance:

9 and think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham.

10 And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees: therefore every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.

11 ¶ I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire:

12 whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.

Verse 8.

John clearly describes what conversion should look like in a person's life.

His baptism was not magic - this rite had no value in and of itself. It was an outward sign of an inward change. Without that change, you only came out as the same sinner as you went in, except that you were soaking wet. The inward change of mind and heart toward God should show itself in the bearing of fruit - a life dedicated to glorifying God, in love and thankfulness for His forgiveness and salvation. The most obvious traits would include truthfulness and honesty, showing mercy, helping others, and the sharing of faith.

Verse 9.

John proceeds to lay out the fallacy of what these groups at present put their faith in: their descent from Abraham. This, they thought, guaranteed their salvation. John knew that descent through the flesh was not the way. A true son of Abraham was born only by faith in God and complete reliance on Him.

John makes a startling and unexpected observation. The great God of all creation could raise up children for Abraham out of these nearby stones. We can imagine John making a sweeping gesture toward all the stones lying around in the wilderness. God made Adam from the dust of the ground. This might have also included the stones as a symbol of people's stony hearts, which God could melt into faithful and obedient ones. Either way, ancestry played no part at all. This also suggests that the inclusion of all people in God's offer of salvation, not only the Jews, but any that came by faith.

Verse 10.

Back to those that refuse to believe: the impenitent. A familiar image is described. When a tree is judged as not able to bear fruit, it will be cut down at the root so that no further sprout will come. The axe is ready for use in destroying one tree after another. Thus John emphasized the time of conversion is right now. This situation is expressed in many passages in both Testaments (Psalms 95:7,8; Isaiah 55:6; Luke 13:7,9; Luke 17:32; John 15:6; Romans 13:11; II Corinthians 6:2; I John 2:18; Revelation 1:3). Judgment of every tree: if it does not bear good fruit, it is cut

Lesson V Continued

down and thrown in to the fire.

Many prophets had preached repentance or destruction to the nation of Israel, but the question of actual calendar time was not the issue. The point was, and remains, that without repentance, destruction is certain. Only God measures the time of the filling of the cup of His wrath.

John was not suggesting that destruction would come upon these individuals or the nation at a particular date, but that while they were alive they had the opportunity and choice to turn to God. Otherwise, destruction was their only destination - the fire unquenchable, prepared also for the devil and his followers. All this expressed the eternal seriousness of God's offer. He was indeed gracious in explaining the certainty of the consequences of rejecting His salvation.

It is also true that destruction did come upon the nation of Israel repeatedly, and that it would again within the lifetimes of most of the apostles in 70 A.D. Also, the final tribulation was yet future. All of these prefigured the Last Judgment and the End of the Age. After that comes the New Heavens and New Earth, the eternal kingdom of God.

John is saying that the time to repent is now. If you don't, you will most likely continue in your sins and be hardened in your rejection, resulting in the certainty of your death unto condemnation, judgment, and eternal torment.

Verse 11.

John explains his role: "I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance:..." Simply going under the water does not confer any magical change. Conversion can take place before baptism - indeed most commonly so, thereby leading one to seek the public sign and rite that shows the person's faith to others.

It is also possible for someone to experience conversion during the baptism. The lowering into the water is the old sinful self dying. The rising is as from death to a new life of faith in God and His forgiveness, and a desire to serve Him from then on. In other words, the effect of baptism on one's body is the outward experience of what takes place in the heart. The body is washed clean by the power of the water, and the heart is purified by the Holy Spirit's power (Hebrews 10:22).

Notice throughout that John makes no claims of having any special power, and certainly is in no way seeking fame or social status. He is showing the way: "but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire:". John emphasizes the greatness of Jesus by saying he is not even worthy to perform the duty of a servant or slave for Him. He was but a tiny lamp compared to the brilliant light of the sun.

Lesson V Continued

Jesus will baptize with the Spirit - an outpouring into the believer, which will purify us from within as with fire burning away our pollution. This was of course preeminently brought to pass at Pentecost - there tongues as of fire resting on each one's head. The fire cleanses and provides light.

Jesus Christ both purifies the saints and purges the earth of the wicked. It is possible that John the Baptist indicates Pentecost and the final judgment. This is also suggested by the following verse.

Verse 12.

Here John clearly refers to judgment. "whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire." He refers to the tossing in the air of the crushed wheat stalks and grain, whereby the stalks, dust, and husks, all chaff, will be blown away by the wind, while the heavier kernels of grain fall back to the floor, being saved and stored. The job is not over until only grain is left. Not one speck of dust will go undetected. Thus will Christ judge righteously.

The grain is valuable, precious, and each one is cared for. Each believer is described at death as "being carried away by the angels," (Luke 6:22); "being at home with the Lord" (II Corinthians 5:8); of being in the very presence of Christ (John 14:3); and in the eternal dwelling with God (Revelation 21:1-5).

The chaff is gathered and burned up. The wicked will also be gathered and placed in hell where the fire will burn forever. This is a place of torment - burning with brimstone, thick with smoke that ascends forever, so they have no rest, day, or night (Revelation 14:9-11). Since this has been prepared for the devil and his angels, and they are spirits, the fire cannot be limited to physical earthly fire. It appears to signify the experience of God's eternal wrath upon them.

It may help by looking at it from an opposite perspective. Think about all of god's attributes: light, love, forgiveness, mercy, patience, grace, wisdom, the plan of Salvation through Jesus, and so forth.

Now take it all away in an instant, and forever. Would that not be hell? No light, no warmth, no love, no kindness, no mercy, no Jesus.

John warned them in the most familiar and in the strongest terms - only to convince them that they must choose what is best for them. The choice is plain and simple - that holds an obvious hope for them to make the right choice.

Lesson V Continued

Matthew 3:13-17. The Baptism of Jesus.

13 ¶ Then cometh Jesus from Galilee to Jordan unto John, to be baptized of him.

14 But John forbade him, saying, I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me?

15 And Jesus answering said unto him, Suffer it to be so now: for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness. Then he suffered him.

16 And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: and, lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him:

17 and lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.

Verse 13.

Jesus made His public appearance, coming from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by John. Luke 3:21 indicates this happening at the greatest time of John's baptizing. An approximate time has been suggested - late 26 or early 27 A.D. John (1:28) suggests that it was north of the Dead Sea, near Bethany and beyond Jordan. This was the time and event beginning Jesus' public ministry. His purpose was to first to be baptized by John, so He comes forward showing His wish to be baptized.

Verse 14.

At first, John is taken aback, recognizing Jesus. He felt unworthy - that he should be baptized by Jesus rather than the other way around. Certainly John's mother Elizabeth had told him concerning Mary and the baby she gave birth to, the promised Savior. He considered it proper that the lesser be blessed by the greater (Hebrews 7:7) and asks why Jesus has come to him.

Verse 15.

Jesus replied that He must fulfill all righteousness. It was proper that they both comply to that end. He asks John to yield to Him this request. Jesus was taking on the role required of every one of Adam's descent, for all fall short of the glory of God because of sin. Jesus represented us with His life and took on our obligation.

It also serves as the public announcement of the Messiah's arrival. The Holy Spirit gave John the task of being Jesus' herald, even before John's birth. This also confirmed the value of John's preaching and baptism, and gave him the time to proclaim that Jesus was the One who he was sent to prepare the way for. No further argument - John gave in to Jesus' proper request.

Lesson V Continued

Verse 16.

"And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: and, lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him:"

This represented the purity and peaceful beauty of the Holy Spirit that was manifested for John and others present. This was the gift of God to His Son, equipping Him for the task He was undertaking. This dove remained for a time - that it was to abide with Him to guide and strengthen His human nature. This is confirmed by many Scriptures: Matthew 14:23; Matthew 17:1-5; Mark 14:36; John 12:27,28; Hebrews 5:8.

At every step, Jesus makes the choice to fulfill the work that the Father has given Him to do. The Holy Spirit has been and will continue to be an integral part. And now, as Jesus has taken the opening step of His public ministry, how appropriate that the Father affirms His presence by blessing His Son.

Verse 17.

"and lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."

The Three are One. The voice is not only for Jesus' benefit - it is also audible to John and the others with him. Though the speaker is not identified, it obviously could only be the Father. The "beloved" includes all the attributes of God's love: intelligent, with purpose, complete, without limit, tender, deep, infinite, eternal.

We can be assured that God's love has not changed at all since that day, nor will it ever. That we have been offered this love through Jesus is beyond understanding. It must be experienced through faith and trust and by the internal witness of the Spirit, that we have been adopted into God's family, forever. We should live out our lives in thanksgiving and gratitude for the gift so precious, even our salvation. Amen.

Lesson VI

Matthew 4:1-11. The Temptation.

- 1 Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil.
- 2 And when he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he was afterward ahungered.
- 3 And when the tempter came to him, he said, If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread.
- 4 But he answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.
- 5 Then the devil taketh him up into the holy city, and setteth him on a pinnacle of the temple,
- 6 and saith unto him, If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down: for it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning thee: and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone.
- 7 Jesus said unto him, It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.
- 8 Again, the devil taketh him up into an exceeding high mountain, and sheweth him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them;
- 9 and saith unto him, All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me.
- 10 Then saith Jesus unto him, Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.
- 11 Then the devil leaveth him, and, behold, angels came and ministered unto him.

Beginning in this chapter, Matthew records the various roles Jesus is to play in the offices necessary to gain man's redemption. First as a priest being the one who offers and the offering itself. In these verses - "He suffered being tempted," (Hebrews 2:18). He still is the king who gives battle to His greatest enemy and defeats him. He also is the Prophet Who heals, teaches, preaches, and prophecies. These, Prophet, Priest, and King, are the threefold aspects of God's promised Messiah.

Verse 1.

Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness, to be tempted by the devil.

From the Jordan, the place of baptism, Jesus was led up to the highland - the rocky wilderness. The Spirit guided Jesus to the remote area where the temptation was destined to take place. The tempter is called the devil - satan - meaning accuser, slanderer, and also the adversary. His only purpose is to destroy God's purpose in sending His Son to save humanity. Satan was going to try to turn Jesus aside from perfect obedience to God and towards sin.

Hebrews 4:15 states the situation clearly: "He was tempted, in all points (in every respect) as we are, yet without sin.)" He never gave in, not having our sinful nature. We are, however, "drawn away and enticed by our own evil desire," (James 1:14) and choose to sin.

Lesson VI Continued

The sense of need, such as hunger, was present. The recognition of a selfish and sinful way to meet that need was also present. Satan presented the easy way to meet the need as obvious and logical, even Scriptural.

Throughout the Gospels, Jesus is described as experiencing physical needs, hunger, thirst, exhaustion - needing rest. He also experienced human emotions: love, affection, sympathy, compassion, anger, gratitude, heartfelt desire to heal, free people from demons, and to the uttermost bring salvation to man. All this to satisfy His deepest desire to accomplish the work His Father had given Him, thus bringing the greatest glory to God forever.

Here, as the case most often is in Scripture, we can only understand a part of what is actually taking place. God's ways are so far above ours that this should not surprise us. Instead, it is evidence that the truth of God's Word is divinely inspired and therefore "Words from God".

Verse 2.

Forty days and nights without food: He was famished. It seems obvious that Jesus used these forty days in prayer and meditation in preparation for the great ministry He was about to undertake. It was going to take His complete dedication and concentration of both His divine and human natures. There would be many difficulties, threatening and tempting Him to turn aside, give up, give in. On the other hand, we may give in without a second thought, to our selfish whims. What a contrast!

Verse 3.

The evil one, here called the tempter, comes to tempt just as he had done in the Garden of Eden. Adam was offered food that was forbidden by God. He had no need of hunger, having the plenteous fruit of all Paradise. Jesus, on the other hand, was indeed famished. So much greater was the temptation.

The wily one formed the condition whereby it should seem natural: since you're God's Son, You should have the power to meet your own needs yourself. Thus you will also prove that power by turning some of these stones into bread. Certainly Jesus had the power to do so (as so gloriously seen later in the feeding of the 5,000 and the 4,000). But to do so here would be selfish, choosing according to His own will, not the Father's.

We have difficulty abstaining from a single meal, much less fasting for a single day, even if for the purpose of prayer. We cannot even imagine the strength it took to resist what the tempter suggested.

Verse 4.

Jesus replied: "It is written, It is not by bread alone that man shall live, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God." (Deuteronomy 8:3.)

These were the words spoken by Moses to the people of Israel as they wandered in the wilderness. He reminded them that though God provided them with physical sustenance through the manna from heaven, it symbolized their spiritual and most important sustenance that God

Lesson VI Continued

provided in His Word.

Jesus was in effect stating that one's relationship with God was the true and indispensable source of power to sustain one's life and well-being. This power is found in every word of God - from creation onward, even now holding the universe together. Depending on God's Word and Will are first, foremost, and essential. What's a loaf of bread compared to that?

The tempter wasn't going to give up easily. On to temptation two.

Verse 5,6.

So you claim to put all your trust in your Father. Let's see some proof. If you are so special, God would not allow you to be hurt. The devil took Him along to the holy city, and set Him on the pinnacle (or highest spot) of the temple. He said that, since you are God's Son throw yourself down and let us see what happens. Then, he quotes Psalm 91:11,12.

He will give his angels instructions concerning you, and
On their hands they will bear you up,
Lest you strike your foot against a stone.

Jesus has just quoted Scripture, so here the devil does also. He is suggesting that since Jesus is God's son (as previously stated), He can prove His trust in God's protection against injury just as Scripture states in the quoted verses (from Psalms 91:11,12). The Psalm describes how God will protect the righteous man in all his righteous ways. It does not suggest that a righteous man would be protected if he acted foolishly, or rashly put himself in danger on purpose, as a test of God's provision. Yet this is what the devil proposes that Jesus should do: to risk His own self-destruction to prove or test God.

Verse 7.

Jesus said to him, It is also written, You shall not put the Lord your God to the test. (Deuteronomy 6:16.) This refers to the time in the wilderness when the people rebelled against Moses and Jehovah because of having no water. They accused Moses of bringing them to that point only to destroy them. They challenged God, saying, is Jehovah with us or not? They demanded proof just as the devil refutes such an insolent challenge to God's providence: you shall not put God to the test.

Again thwarted in his purpose, the devil throws everything he can at Jesus in the final attempt to persuade Jesus that what he offers is the greatest thing that anyone could ever desire - the whole world.

Verses 8,9.

The devil takes Jesus to a very high mountain and shows Him

Lesson VI Continued

all the kingdoms of the world in their splendor, and said to Him, all these I will give you if you prostrate yourself before me and worship me.

The question has often arisen as to how all the kingdoms of the world could be naturally seen from one mountain and in such a brief time. The most obvious way would be in a vision, which would not require traveling through time - since these were shown to Jesus in a few moments. Since we are not specifically told, and since the how of the temptation in no way changes the strength of it, there is no point in wasting time in speculation or debate. This is the view of John Calvin and most fair-minded scholars after him.

Next question: did the devil have actual possession of all the kingdoms of the world? Were they his to dispose of as he pleased? It is often stated that he has great power over the world of men because of the evil in himself as well as our own sinful nature. He is called the prince of the domain of the air, and of spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. (Ephesians 2:2; 6:12.)

In Luke 4:6, he pictures himself as ruler and rightful owner of the world. But from the beginning he has boasted above his station and lied continually. He is on the contrary kept within bounds and cannot go beyond what God permits. This is also true during Jesus' time on earth. The tempter is still lying - but kept within limits.

The true temptation here is that Jesus could take over the world to rule, not just because satan offered it to him. But no way would Jesus worship him. The contrast was between the cross and the crown. Was this not the strength of the offer - to take the easy way out, to think about bypassing the hatred, persecution, condemnation, beating, the cruel death on the cross.

As we will continually see during Jesus' ministry, He must continually choose to stay on the path of suffering, to fulfill the Father's will to save mankind from their sins. Even in the garden He asks if this cup can pass from Him. He then as here chooses the Father's will above His own.

It must also be said that Jesus does not dispute the devil's claim, but also we can say that even if Jesus did worship him, most likely satan wouldn't have given Jesus his power over the earthly kingdoms. Jesus knew he was a liar, that he was lying here, and there was no point in starting an argument. To argue with a liar only brings further lies.

Verse 10.

The Truth of the Word is given in answer to the accuser and he is dismissed - Be gone!

It is written:

You shall worship the Lord your god,
And Him only shall you serve.

The adversary is put in his place. Jesus commands him to leave, and he obeys.

Verse 11.

Then the devil left Him, and behold - angels came and were rendering service to Him. This seems to go along with the idea of

Lesson VI Continued

visions, that He was still physically in the wilderness, and they were sent by the Father to provide for His needs. These included physical needs, as well as spiritual strengthening needed after such an ordeal.

Matthew 4:12-17. Beginning Ministry.

12 ¶ Now when Jesus had heard that John was cast into prison, he departed into Galilee;
 13 and leaving Nazareth, he came and dwelt in Caper'na-um, which is upon the seacoast, in the borders of Zeb'ulun and Naph'tali:
 14 that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaiah the prophet, saying,
 15 The land of Zeb'ulun, and the land of Naph'tali, by the way of the sea, beyond Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles;
 16 the people which sat in darkness saw great light; and to them which sat in the region and shadow of death light is sprung up.
 17 From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

Verses 13-16 are only found in Matthew.

Verse 12.

When Jesus heard that John had been arrested, He went from Judea, north into Galilee. No time is mentioned as to how long after Jesus' baptism and temptation this took place. It has been estimated that it was about a year later. John, in his Gospel, records events that took place in this interval (John 1:19-4:42). Thus the date of the move to Galilee would be late in 27 A.D.

Why Jesus left Judea at this time: John the Baptist was now taken to prison. During his ministry, he had become very popular and revered by multitudes of the area - in and around Jerusalem. This had brought with it the consternation and scrutiny, eventually jealousy and hatred, of the religious leaders in Jerusalem. They went out to see and hear him, and had been called vile and evil. For him to be arrested was to their benefit.

But now focus would be on Jesus and His following. During the last part of John's ministry, he had pointed to Jesus as the Lamb of God Who would take away the sins of His people, and told his followers to follow Jesus. Jesus must increase in popularity, and he must decrease. This had taken place - Jesus' following had increased far beyond John's.

Now with John gone, the chief priests and other religious leaders would focus their jealousy and hatred on Jesus alone. The danger here was a premature confrontation and possible crisis. Jesus must work within the framework of God's decreed timetable, therefore the move north, out of Judea.

Verse 13.

Some might have expected Jesus to return home to Nazareth to begin His ministry. This was not the plan - it still being a small,

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out of the way location - and His home. We see the attitude of the people of His hometown when He visits later in time.

He goes to Capernaum by the sea and settles there. This was in the territory given to Zebulun and Naphtali. The origin of the name Capernaum has not been established. The meaning of the words can be interpreted as village of compassion or consolation. At one time this was the place Matthew had his office as tax collector.

Nearby this town Jesus called Peter and Andrew, James and John. It became the center of Christ's ministry for Galilee. He healed many, cast out demons. He usually went to the synagogue, delivering many teachings, for example, the teaching on "the Bread of Life (John 6:24-65). Matthew later identifies Capernaum as Jesus' own city. (9:1.)

Verses 14-16.

Matthew quotes Isaiah 9:1,2 to show that even this change of location was a fulfillment of prophecy.

Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali
Toward the sea, beyond the Jordan,
Galilee of the Gentiles,
The people sitting in darkness
Have seen a great light,
And upon those sitting in the land of the shadow of death
Light has dawned.

It was not to the aristocracy, the important political and religious leaders that Jesus offered His message of salvation. It was to the poor, despised, largely uneducated people of Galilee that He went. This population was a mixture of Jews and Gentiles. Most of His life was spent in this area, growing up, and in ministry. Here also His disciples were largely from. This area was ruled by Herod Antipas. More than Judea, this region had been conquered and overrun by invaders from the north - Syria, Assyria, etc. They are described as sitting in darkness, in the land of death's shadow. They were heavily influenced by pagan moral and religious practices brought in and practiced by their conquerors.

The image of "the land of the shadow of death" includes danger, fear, without hope of any help. Sitting in darkness - besides physical darkness, it points to mental and soulful lostness - seeing no way out, no hope.

Light, the opposite of darkness, points to the true light of the knowledge of God. Only in the Gospel of Jesus would those lost in darkness, without hope, see the light and joy of the salvation He offers. Jesus has come with mercy, forgiveness, and power to bring the great light of salvation to the hearts and minds of those who accept Him, to guide their life from that moment and forever, all

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unto God's glory. Matthew ends this paragraph with a brief description of Jesus' message.

Verse 17.

"From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

The kingdom of heaven is that very realm of light that Isaiah foretold. To know Christ is to live in the light of God's kingdom of love and forgiveness.

Next: Calling the Four Fishermen.

Lesson VII

Matthew 4:18-22. Calling the Four Fishermen.

18 ¶ And Jesus, walking by the sea of Galilee, saw two brethren, Simon called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea: for they were fishers.

19 And he saith unto them, Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.

20 And they straightway left their nets, and followed him.

21 And going on from thence, he saw other two brethren, James the son of Zeb'edee, and John his brother, in a ship with Zeb'edee their father, mending their nets; and he called them.

22 And they immediately left the ship and their father, and followed him.

As background to these verses it was obviously Jesus' plan from the beginning to gather of group of 12 close disciples to teach and train and be witnesses to all that He would say and do. They were to be the foundation of the Church, and recorders of what would become the New Testament. Though Matthew and John were the only apostles who wrote Gospels, Mark and Luke relied heavily on many eyewitnesses of the apostles, as well as Mary the mother of Jesus, and others not identified.

Also we must remember that about a year earlier, the account in John 1:35-51, when John the Baptist had pointed out Jesus as the Lamb of God, Andrew and his brother Peter went to Jesus. It can be assumed that the unnamed disciple, John, brought his brother James. Then Philip and also Nathaniel also joined the group of disciples. We can surmise that in the succeeding month, they would accompany Jesus whenever possible, but continuing their regular occupations.

Now, a year later, around the beginning of 28 A.D., these four are called upon to spend a greater and more constant amount of time with Jesus (Peter, Andrew, James, and John). They are to be trained to be fishers of men. Two things need to be stressed: first, these were very normal men with no great intellect, spiritual maturity or understanding, no great humility, or courage. Yet, they had a mind and heart to believe Who Jesus was, however little they could grasp, here at the beginning. Second, the mesmerizing and drawing power of Jesus: we can barely imagine the peaceful kindness, the sympathetic love and spiritual presence Jesus showed these men, that drew them to accept and follow Him.

Briefly, the four:

Peter the impetuous, who becomes the leader and is mentioned first in every list of the Twelve.

Andrew, Peter's brother, was seen bringing people to Jesus.

James, son of Zebedee, first apostle to be killed.

John, brother of James, called the disciple Jesus loved - having a closer attachment than the others.

Verses 18-20.

On this occasion, Peter and Andrew were casting nets into the sea. This was a circular net with weights attached around the perimeter. When cast properly, it will open to the complete circle,

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fall into the water, and as the weights cause it to quickly sink, it will trap any fish underneath. Jesus interrupts them, calling upon them to stop and come with Him, and that He will make them fishers of men. The importance of the task requires them to heed this call. They come, thereby acknowledging that what Jesus was going to engage them in was a far greater work than catching fish. Indeed the most important work of all, the spreading of the Good News of salvation through Jesus.

Verses 21,22.

James and John, with their father are mending their nets in the boat. Jesus calls them to the same work, to give up their ordinary work and go with Him. They leave their father, who makes no protest, and go with Jesus. As we learn later, Zebedee has servants and will in no way suffer from his sons' leaving.

Matthew 4:23-25. The Ministry of Teaching, Preaching, and Healing.

23 ¶ And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all manner of sickness and all manner of disease among the people.

24 And his fame went throughout all Syria: and they brought unto him all sick people that were taken with divers diseases and torments, and those which were possessed with devils, and those which were lunatic, and those that had the palsy; and he healed them.

25 And there followed him great multitudes of people from Galilee, and from Decap'olis, and from Jerusalem, and from Judea, and from beyond Jordan.

These verses summarize the Galilean Ministry of Jesus.

The difference between teaching and preaching needs to be emphasized. Both contain elements of the other. Preaching focuses on proclaiming a message: announcing. Teaching focuses on giving the details, explaining, and expanding on the message proclaimed. Preaching is to inspire and impart information. Teaching is to impart information and inspire. Jesus did both.

The gospel of the kingdom, otherwise called "the kingdom of God", or "the kingdom of heaven", refers first to the recognition of the sovereignty of God. This means that God comes first in the minds and hearts of men, that He is king over their lives, that they are His subjects. Secondly, it also includes salvation as a result of their accepting God as their king, trusting Him for here and hereafter.

Mark 10:25,26 brings the two together. Jesus is describing the difficulty of a rich man entering the kingdom of God. The disciples respond with the question, "Then who can be saved?" The subjects of this kingdom became the church. Matthew 16:18,19, brings these two together, "...upon this rock will I build my church...I will give unto you the keys of the kingdom of heaven." Also this kingdom is eternal and will one day become perfect in the new heavens and earth eternally. It begins within the heart of individuals and grows and spreads until the time of the harvest.

The term "kingdom of heaven" emphasizes that this is a

Lesson VII Continued

supernatural work of God, offered to men for their salvation from sin, all to the glory of the Father in heaven. It is His plan, His purpose, His power, His gift, "Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven."

Jesus went throughout Galilee, preaching and teaching wherever the opportunity arose, as well as their synagogues on the Sabbath, as was His custom.

Part of His ministry was also healing, and this without any discrimination of race, color, creed, financial status, or anything else. This area was a mixture of peoples, Jew, Gentile, and pagans of all types. The only requirement was need. He healed "every illness and every infirmity among the people." His heart was and is one full of compassion and love for all those who need Him. This includes us. His offering of Salvation is in the same way offered to all.

Verse 24.

Most likely it was the miracles of healing that caused the news about Him to spread north toward Antioch and Damascus, the area known as Syria. Many Jews had settled there, some voluntarily, some by force, over the years. There would be strong ties, economic, family, and religious, with their compatriots in Galilee and Judea. Capernaum was on the highway that came down from Damascus. Just hearing the news brought hope to those who needed healing, and they brought to him all who were afflicted, distressed by all kinds of illnesses and torments. Demoniacs, epileptics, and paralytics. Jesus healed them all. What an astounding statement!

The mention of the demon-possessed also implies that this condition was the cause of other afflictions (see Matthew 9:33; 12:22; 17:15,18). The term epileptics refers to those who had seizures. Paralytics also - all were healed.

It was very much like Jesus was out to destroy this oppression and other works of the devil. He taught and preached about the love of God, healing of the soul, cast out demons, and healed all illnesses. He brought more and more into the kingdom of His Father, where He brought healing to body and soul, and hope; trust forgiveness and love and compassion to those who had been sitting in darkness, in the valley of the shadow of death. Now the light had dawned and spread continually and still shines today.

Verse 25.

As the only possible result, more and more people heard that there was a miracle going on, they came from everywhere around: Galilee, Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea, and from beyond the Jordan. They came from the north, south, east, and west. They were drawn to the light, for it held out hope.

Matthew 5:1,2. Introduction to the Sermon on the Mount.

1 And seeing the multitudes, he went up into a mountain: and when he was set, his disciples came unto him:

2 and he opened his mouth, and taught them, saying,

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It is generally accepted that this was a well-known mountain near Capernaum. The exact location is not known since there are two or three possibilities. The point is that it was a place where Jesus could sit above with an area below Him where a great crowd could gather and all be able to hear Him. We can imagine it being a gentle grassy slope, rather than jagged and rocky.

As one can picture, once Jesus sat down, His disciples, would come and sit nearest Him. Then others would gather around as Jesus began to teach.

Jesus proceeds to describe the Godly fundamental principles of human conduct that should be practiced by all people, no matter when or where they lived.

A brief description of the Sermon: The overall theme is the Gospel of the Kingdom. There are three major divisions.

First, Jesus describes the citizens of God's kingdom, their character and blessedness (verses 2-12), and their relationship with the world as salt and light (verses 13-16).

Second, He describes the righteousness of the kingdom, the high standard of moral principles, which include those written in the Old Testament (5:17-19). This is contrasted with the traditions and interpretations of both ancient Jewish writers as well as the scribes and Pharisees of the time, which in effect, watered down, or added to what God intended.

The emphasis is on complete dependence on and trust in God alone - and above all things (chapter 6). This must be of the heart and mind, within, not outward performance to be noticed by others.

In man's relationship with his fellow men, "Love your neighbor as yourself," is the rule to follow. To follow this rule, one must seek wisdom by continual prayer. Christ's golden rule is stated in 7:12.

Third, Jesus ends the sermon with heartfelt urging to enter the kingdom (verses 13-27). He describes the journey: beginning - verses 13,14; progress - verses 15-20; the final destination - a contrast between those who say and those who do - verses 21-23. Then, hearers and doers - verses 24-27. The final four verses describe the result in the parable of the two builders: the smart one who built upon the rock, and the foolish one who built upon the sand.

Verses 28 and 29 describe how the sermon affected those who heard it.

The opening of the sermon includes the eight "Blessed" statements. These have come to be called "The Beatitudes". He is describing those that are blessed by God. They must have captured the minds and hearts of His audience immediately. What He was saying was in complete contrast to the normal way of thinking from the worldly, and even the religious, points of view. They considered that only the powerful, the popular, the wealthy, the strong, successful, and prosperous, were "blessed". Jesus said that the opposite was true. He

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did not just say the poor, but the poor in spirit. Not just the hungry and thirsty, but those hungry and thirsty for righteousness.

They are to be considered "happy" because God is with them, and their standing as citizens of the kingdom is certain, which includes the future realization in heaven. As they look to God, He looks after them.

Each beatitude has three parts: 1. The word "Blessed". 2. The person described. 3. The reason why. The realm of their blessing is spiritual, not physical, or earthly.

We must also be reminded that Jesus speaks about qualities demanded of others that He embodies perfectly Himself. In everything He did, He lived out everything He said. Thus, His example is for all Christians of all times. This certainly must have had a profound effect on those who heard Him and also saw how He lived His life in perfect alignment with His message, truly the love of God embodied in the flesh. It is also the sternest rebuke against hypocrisy also from that time to our own, where we have seen the exposure of the hidden lives of too many Christian leaders.

There had been a general consensus that there is an onward and upward movement from the first to the last beatitude. Beginning with a realization of one's sinful nature and lost condition, a recognition of the need to reform, to be reborn, a restoration of a right relationship with God. Then, having received mercy, to be merciful to others, trusting in God alone. A peace passing all understanding is present, thus to become a peacemaker. With all this blessing also comes persecution as the result of clashing with those of the world, but be comforted, for Jesus told His disciples - "Be of good courage for I have conquered the world." (John 16:33.)

Next, the Beatitudes Begin.

Lesson VIII

Matthew 5:3-12. The Beatitudes.

3 ¶ Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
 4 ¶ Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted.
 5 ¶ Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth.
 6 ¶ Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled.
 7 ¶ Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy.
 8 ¶ Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.
 9 ¶ Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God.
 10 ¶ Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
 11 ¶ Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake.
 12 Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.

Verse 3. The First Beatitude.

"Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." This indicates a person's inner awareness of their own spiritual poverty. No pride here, only an inner need for mercy and forgiveness which can only come from God. A contrite spirit recognizes its own helplessness. They are those who depend on and trust God for their salvation, thus accepting Him as king of their lives. They are called blessed because they have what the world cannot deliver.

The world promises everything. Yet, those who enjoy power and wealth will see in the end that everything the world promises will only last for a season. Then it is gone forever.

The things we have in God and His Christ, begin now and last forever. Therefore, we are considered rich. We have God's love, mercy, forgiveness, and the peace that passes all understanding. These blessings make us content in whatever circumstances we may be in. Think of the contentment of Paul through the trials and tribulations that he faced. His riches were laid up in Heaven.

Verse 4. The Second Beatitude.

"Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted." This connects with the previous one. Those who are poor in spirit also mourn over their sinful condition, and the consequences thereof. This can also include an acknowledgment of the sins of others that dishonor God, especially those that claim to be Christians. This is Godly sorrow that focuses on God's glory. These people will be comforted, and therefore blessed by God. Comforted in Christ's Salvation, a free gift - and eternal.

Verse 5. The Third Beatitude.

"Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth." The word "meek" describes a person's attitude and behavior towards his fellows and toward God. "The poor in spirit" describes what takes place within. Meekness would include what a person would not do - be

Lesson VIII Continued

resentful, hold grudges, or seek revenge. Meekness would seek refuge in God.

It is not a person who gives in to everyone about everything. It is not weakness. It is rather a choice that it is better to suffer injury than to inflict injury. Meekness trusts God. The meek person seeks to live a life unto God, not the measure or values of the world. They are also a blessing to others, sharing the blessings God has given them.

The ultimate fulfillment of this begins in the present, but will not be completed until the new heavens and the new earth, where no sin will remain. By grace, the meek receive this inheritance as citizens of God's kingdom. The down payment now, the fulfillment later.

Verse 6. The Fourth Beatitude.

"Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled." When one realizes the true nature of his own sin, he also has to face the fact that he has no ability to earn his own righteousness. No one ever has or ever could. Then Christ came to fulfill the will of God in complete and true righteousness. God lay upon Him the iniquity of us all. Only those who realize their own helplessness seek help from the only One that can give it: God alone, through Christ. It is only in Christ that we can have righteousness before God.

This includes God's work in a believer's heart - the desire to practice righteousness in your life, both within and without - doing good works. This has been called "Sanctification by the Holy Spirit". Those who are redeemed live a life of thanksgiving, and sharing their goods and faith with all they come in contact with.

Verses 7. The Fifth Beatitude.

"Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy." Many Scriptures emphasize that believers should continually show mercy out of heartfelt gratitude for the mercy they have been given in Christ's sacrifice for their sins. It must be shown to believers and unbelievers, even those who hate and persecute Christians. It must be believed, and practiced. The reward from the Lord is mercy. Unmerited favor - when nothing we have done deserves it, so we must do likewise toward others.

Verse 8. The Sixth Beatitude.

"Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God."

Psalms 24:3,4.

3 Who shall ascend into the hill of the LORD? Or who shall stand in his holy place?

4 He that hath clean hands, and a pure heart; who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity, nor sworn deceitfully.

A pure heart has no pretense, and shows only truth. No hypocrisy, or duplicity - only sincerity and honesty. In this context, it must also include seeing it from God's point of view. The

Lesson VIII Continued

pure in heart also seek to please God and follow His will as revealed in His word. Sincerity must be based on God's truth. Those whose mind and heart are therefore in tune with God.

The more we know God, the more we seek to be like Him. The more we understand about His mercy and love and forgiveness, especially as shown in the ministry of His beloved Son, do we also seek to become like Him. This culminates in heaven when faith turns to sight, face to face. (I Corinthians 13:12.)

Verse 9. The Seventh Beatitude.

"Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God." Having experienced the peace of reconciliation with God through Christ, now by word and deed, the believer seeks to share this gift with others, that they may also know this peace. It is so needed in this world of selfishness, hate, strife, vengeance, greed, murder, robbery, war, deceitfulness, adultery -the list goes on.

Christ is the true Prince of Peace, Who proclaimed the Gospel of peace, which is brought by His sacrifice on the cross. Those who find peace here also desire to share it with all men. This is not a negotiation, a deal, compromise, or comes in any way from anything a man can do. It is the gift of God. Those who believe and seek to share this truth will not be guaranteed success in this sinful world, but will be called sons of God because of their standing and efforts towards peace.

Because of man's sin, there will be great opposition and persecution, often from one's own family. (Matthew 10:34-36.) As God's representatives on earth they shall be honored by God and shall be called His sons. What a blessing that will be!

Verse 10. The Eighth Beatitude.

"Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." When the world begins to notice the changes in a believer's behavior and conversation, persecution begins. To have the heartfelt desire to please God and do His will, means to stay on that path no matter what. The goals and values are in complete disharmony with the world and brings persecution. It is like shining a light on those who wish to live in the shadows. The world hates the children of God, those who are considered righteous.

This was in contrast to the commonly held belief by most Jews of that time. They believed that persecutions, and all suffering, were the result of God's displeasure resulting from some sin that had been committed. Obviously, many evil deeds bring painful consequences, but Jesus is pointing out that to be persecuted for righteousness was pleasing to God. The reward would be the kingdom of heaven.

Verses 11,12.

"Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake."

"Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you."

This is a continuation of the previous beatitude. In this case, the second person (you) is addressed rather than the third person (he). Here the persecuted person is to become happy to the utmost

Lesson VIII Continued

possible. Be exceedingly glad, to be filled with exuberant joy, rejoice tremendously. I Peter 1:8: "rejoicing greatly with joy unspeakable and full of glory," when he contemplated the heavenly grace and glory of Jesus Christ. Thus are we to do when contemplating what we endure for Christ's sake, contrasted with what reward we shall receive in heaven.

Forms of persecution: reproach, the heaping of insults, as well as false and evil accusations. Thus did the religious leaders insult Jesus by saying He had a demon, etc...The disciples would also experience this kind of treatment. Slander - making up lies about Christians, calling them immoral for their secret ways, unreligious because they claimed to worship an "invisible" God, unpatriotic because they would not worship the emperor, and so on.

Being persecuted for Christ's sake also meant that they were recognized by their living by their faith. That should bring joy in being accounted worthy of persecution as did the prophets of old. It was the rule, not the exception, that God's prophets were ill-treated, some even put to death. Jesus was also indicating by this that His message was in line with the Old Testament. He was there to fulfill, not to cancel or change anything therein. The ultimate persecution was of course that of Jesus Himself, unto death.

Jesus turns to describing the effects the citizens of God's kingdom have on the world. The two images used are salt and light.

Matthew 5:13-16.

13 ¶ Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savor, wherewith shall it be salted? it is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men.

14 ¶ Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hid.

15 Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house.

16 Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.

Verse 13.

You are the salt of the earth. This is a metaphor which brings out specific qualities that people of God have in relation to the world. The first quality relates to preservation - preventing decay and corruption. Christians are witnesses against moral and spiritual corruption, a restraining power. This is by their example of life and conversation, and by the power of prayer.

As salt does its work, we cannot observe how it is accomplished. The influence of Christians cannot likewise be observed. Think for a moment what would happen if all Christians were taken out of the world (the Rapture), their preserving influence would be gone. The Holy Spirit's preserving influence would also be gone - thus the

Lesson VIII Continued

Great Tribulation.

Another quality of salt is the enhancing of flavor. Imagine the world without good deeds and charity and all the other things Christians bring to the world.

The other half of salt is this. When it loses savor, it becomes tasteless. It cannot be made salty again and has no use - it is thrown out and trampled underfoot. Jesus had observed the religious leaders and their adherence to a form of religion, legalistic rituals based on traditions of men, having outward performance without reaching the heart.

Thus, those who claimed to be sons of the kingdom had actually lost the quality of true spirituality and the true worship of God. Their influence was worthless, tasteless. They would be thrown out and trampled on. Just as salt without flavor cannot be made salty again, these men would not repent - they had hardened their hearts.

The operation of salt is unseen. The operation of light is the complete opposite - openly seen by all.

Verse 14.

"You are the light of the world."

Throughout the Bible, light represents the true knowledge of God. It includes the ideas associated with that knowledge: goodness, kindness, happiness, trust, fairness, love, forgiveness, and contentment. These are all blessings of being a believer in Christ Jesus - Savior and Friend.

Having these qualities, as light in the world, includes them shining forth around them. Thus believers become God's light in the world. We receive light from the Lord and only then can we have light to shine. Without Him we cannot shine. This light should affect every area of a person's life. The spreading of the Gospel and the salvation of others are always of the highest importance.

The complete opposite is darkness - selfishness, pride, lies, lust, all kinds of evil, and life without hope.

Jesus then gives two examples that bring out the two qualities that Christians must have and show.

First, a city on a hill stands out and sits above its surroundings. Being visible to all those around it, it cannot be overlooked or disregarded.

Second, a lamp that radiates light and makes things visible should not be put under a basket, but on a lamp stand where the light shines for everyone in the house. A great many of the people Jesus was speaking to were not well-off financially and live in houses that only had one room. A lamp within a house illustrates what a Christian should be in the world, and in a family. We must let our light shine before men. Our conduct of good works, which are the result of our faith and wishing to honor and show gratitude should be seen of men and bring glory to our Father in heaven. This does not suggest that

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works should only be done in public. What we do should be the same whether in private or public.

What is seen will be noticed, and influence those in darkness, showing them a different way from their own. Even they will, to some extent, recognize the true author of these works as God, as part of the ministry of the Holy Spirit. And some may be drawn to the light and accept its source in God and become a believer in His Son.

A note about God the Father in Heaven. Many Scriptures in the Old Testament speak of God as the Father, not only of the nation of Israel, but also individual believers. Several are in the Psalms: 68:5; 89:26,28; 27:10. "A Father to the fatherless"; "Thou art my Father, my God"; "As a father pities his children, so Jehovah pities those that fear Him"; "Though my father and mother have forsaken me, yet Jehovah accepts me". Jesus brings out this personal relationship we are offered through His gift of salvation and teaches all who believe in Him to pray, "Our Father Who art in Heaven."

Lesson IX

Matthew 5:17-37. Right Living of the Kingdom.

17 ¶ Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil.
18 For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled.
19 Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.
20 For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.
21 ¶ Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment:
22 but I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire.
23 Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath aught against thee;
24 leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift.
25 Agree with thine adversary quickly, while thou art in the way with him; lest at any time the adversary deliver thee to the judge, and the judge deliver thee to the officer, and thou be cast into prison.
26 Verily I say unto thee, Thou shalt by no means come out thence, till thou hast paid the uttermost farthing.
27 ¶ Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery:
28 but I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart.
29 And if thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell.
30 And if thy right hand offend thee, cut it off, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell.
31 ¶ It hath been said, Whosoever shall put away his wife, let him give her a writing of divorcement:
32 but I say unto you, That whosoever shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, causeth her to commit adultery: and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced committeth adultery.
33 ¶ Again, ye have heard that it hath been said by them of old time, Thou shalt not forswear thyself, but shalt perform unto the Lord thine oaths:
34 but I say unto you, Swear not at all; neither by heaven; for it is God's throne:
35 nor by the earth; for it is his footstool: neither by Jerusalem; for it is the city of the great King.
36 Neither shalt thou swear by thy head, because thou canst not make one hair white or black.

Lesson IX Continued

37 But let your communication be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay: for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil.

Verse 17.

Jesus explains the expectations of Holy living as found in the Law which He has come - not to set aside - but to fulfill. He includes the prophets to show that He accepts the entire Old Testament that He has come to fulfill. His critics among the scribes and Pharisees still would continue to accuse Him of trying to change God's law, and actually breaking it (Sabbath regulations come to mind). They had added traditions and regulations of men where the true intent of the Law was covered over. They worked for their salvation, which was and is backwards.

In the beatitudes Jesus had described those who were blessed because they had realized their spiritual poverty, had mourned over their sins and repented. They had received forgiveness through the sacrifice of Jesus, and a new desire to please God out of gratitude for His gift, also a desire to share their faith and love with others.

Jesus was also saying that He Himself was fulfilling the law and the prophets, in His own life, and ultimately in His death, resurrection, and ascension. He came to fulfill the Law perfectly, which no man had done. He also came to fulfill the prophecies concerning the Messiah - the suffering servant.

Verse 18.

The word "verily" comes from "in very truth". It can also be translated as "amen". The root of this word means "confirmed" or "established as truth". It is also a solemn word, meaning that "verily" emphasizes a solemn truth. Therefore, Jesus introduces His statement - that of a most serious and important nature.

Not until this present universe is changed will every part of the Old Testament have been fulfilled. This is further emphasized by the mentioning of the tiniest parts of writing - the tiniest letter or even the tiniest hook on a letter will not disappear from the law until all it calls for has come to pass. In our language, the equivalent examples would be dotting the "i" and crossing the "t". Not until the new heavens and new earth will the necessity of the Bible be over. There will be no more sin, or death, or any bad thing among God's people, for they shall be there with Him and His Son forever. Then all that God planned shall have been carried out, to the tiniest detail.

Verse 19. This verse emphasizes the great importance God's commandments are in the life of the believer. Even the least in importance should not be ignored or taught against. One who does this will be considered least in the kingdom of heaven. Whoever does, teaches, and practices them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. The greatest commandment was to love the Lord with all your heart, mind, and strength (Luke 10:28). These refer to God's moral law which Jesus is about to relate in greater detail in verse 21. This is the rule of Jesus in this life and the next. Though saved by grace through faith, we will be judged in heaven according to works, and rewarded accordingly.

Lesson IX Continued

Kingdom righteousness is in full agreement with the principles as spelled out in the Old Testament. Now He is going to contrast this with the interpretations and traditions of men. This points directly to rabbis, scribes, and Pharisees.

Verse 20.

A solemn pronouncement - unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will most certainly never enter the kingdom of heaven. From here, Jesus will contrast the traditional interpretation as adopted by these religious leaders with what God intended.

The understanding that Jesus wants His hearers to realize is that God looks at the heart. One's deeds come from what is in the mind and heart. Therefore the righteousness God requires includes what is within as well as one's actions.

The religious leaders followed outward forms and lip service - a performance, not from the heart. Luke 16:15 - "You are those who justify yourselves before men, but God knows your hearts." They created their own righteousness: they were self-righteous.

In the next verses, Jesus is going to contrast the true understanding concerning 6 commandments and the misinterpretations taught by the scribes as being "correct".

Verse 21.

When Jesus uses the phrase, "You have heard it was said by the men of long ago", it indicates an oral tradition passed down in unwritten form. This is the 6th Commandment from the Law passed to Moses. You shall not kill. Then the addition - "Whoever kills deserves to be punished by death." While this seems right, it does not go far enough. The law is not a penal code. It lacks teaching against the mental and spiritual attitudes, beliefs, and emotions that produce murder. It also lacks teaching the positive ways that prevent such thoughts or desires.

Verse 22.

"But I say to you," begins the contrasting pronouncement that Jesus states as His own, the true understanding from God. He warns against the inward attitudes and feelings such as anger, jealousy, and hatred that are the beginning of the outward act of murder. Jesus says that to entertain these feelings toward another is worthy of death.

To even call someone a name, such as "blockhead" should be condemned to death by the supreme court. Someone who calls another an "idiot" should be cast into the hell of fire. Before God such persons deserve not only physical death but also includes eternal death. Jesus points to the evil disposition of the heart, from which the evil deed comes. The religious leaders only dealt with the outward deed.

The positive commandment, love thy neighbor as thyself, is the second greatest, and its practice prevents the anger, jealousy, and hatred within, which lead to outward evil deeds. The first murder

Lesson IX Continued

sprang from the jealous anger of Cain towards Abel. Obviously the 2nd great commandment is not possible without the 1st. - Love God. Only then can one practice loving one's neighbor.

Verses 23,24.

"Therefore" indicates that what follows is a logical result. These verses also go from general to specific. This is also shown by His use of the singular "you". Though this is not clear in English, the context demands it. Jesus is talking to each person, that they must each examine their own heart. They should at all times have love in their heart, especially when worshipping God. In this case, bringing an offering to the altar.

If the person remembers an issue of grievance his brother has against him, he must stop what he is doing and go to be reconciled with his brother. Then he may return and present his offering to God. Whether the person feels the grievance is justified by fact or not is not important. If the other person merely thinks that he has reason and breaks the relationship, it is still right to straighten the misunderstanding out and be reconciled. The time to do so is always at the earliest opportunity.

Verses 25,26.

Jesus proceeds to describe a case where a person has already begun to seek legal redress for a financial debt. Jesus advises the debtor to do his very best to deal with the one he owes privately and work diligently to settle the matter in a friendly and accommodating way. Otherwise you will be taken before a judge who most likely will find you guilty, and hand you over to the officer, who will throw you in prison. Emphatically, Jesus suggests that you will remain there until every last penny is paid. This suggests that the debtor will remain in prison, not being able to earn any money, and the debt will never be paid.

Jesus' message, beyond the physical circumstances of each case, speaks concerning God's law, from the spiritual viewpoint. God reads men's hearts. Each person will face judgment. To be right means the inner disposition of the heart. If one carries hatred or resentment in their heart, then their destination will not be jail, but hell. To obey the 6th commandment, the 2nd commandment must be obeyed first; love thy neighbor. This, as will be seen, is true of all the other commandments. What is within is the cause of the outward act.

Verses 27,28.

Jesus explains that adultery must not only be considered an outward act. He warns that what leads to breaking this just commandment must be taught against. Anyone who looks at someone in order to lust after them has already committed adultery with that person in their own heart. This describes not just innocent looking but seeking out and "looking to lust after". This could also be

Lesson IX Continued

considered a sin for the single person also. Thus, the intent of the heart is considered adultery by God, just as hatred in the heart toward another is considered murder.

Verses 29,30.

Using a most drastic and dramatic description of physical self-mutilation, Jesus explains the importance of doing whatever is necessary to put out of your life whatever tempts you to sin. This physical life is not the end - you are to avoid your whole body being thrown into eternal hell. Even something so needful to us as one eye and one hand is not worth the sacrifice of one's eternal destiny.

How radical the images are! That is how deadly and serious sin can be. It can and does destroy people's lives, here, and also hereafter. Jesus was only directing his listeners to carefully think over the contrast: would it be better to go into eternal hell with a complete and unharmed body, or go through this life maimed and live in heaven eternally?

The use of the eye is obviously tied to Jesus' description of the looking to lust. The hand to the anger unto murder that the right hand would carry out.

Verses 31,32.

Divorce: the seriousness of God's decree concerning marriage is shown. The traditional practice of divorce among the Jews only required the husband to give his wife a divorce certificate. The reasons allowed for this were based on any dissatisfaction, however, minor. Jesus emphasizes that a piece of paper cannot cancel a marriage. This had been started by Moses as a concession because of men's sinfulness, as a way to protect the rejected wife. God's original plan for marriage is what Jesus must forcefully remind these people of. He states that only the wife's infidelity is grounds for divorce. Otherwise the wife will be forced into adultery if she has relations with, or marries, another man. The man also would be guilty of adultery. God's intention was for one man and one woman to be joined until death. Unfaithfulness tears that bond apart - physically, emotionally, and spiritually.

To divorce for anything less, Jesus explains, is putting his wife in danger. Before God, a piece of paper does not dissolve a marriage. The husband puts her out and makes her situation such that in seeking to survive she marries another man. Before God she and the other man are guilty of adultery. This stand on God's intent for marriage forcefully discourages divorce, also showing the true misinterpretation of the law by the rabbis.

Verses 33-37. Taking an Oath.

Several passages in the Law concern oaths to the Lord: Leviticus 19:12; Numbers 30:2; Deuteronomy 23:21. The emphasis is in each case to not swear falsely, to not break their word, to not be slack in carrying out their vow. To make a vow and to swear an oath were synonymous. The entire point is truth. If someone makes a vow and adds an oath to emphasize his intent, it is absolutely essential that the vow is carried out.

God made promises confirmed with an oath (Psalms 132:11) to

Lesson IX Continued

David. And to believers in the New Testament in Hebrews 6:18 the promise and the oath, it is added that it is impossible for God to lie.

The emphasis, as passed down by the rabbis, had changed. Now an oath sworn to the Lord must be kept. If the Lord's name was not included, the oath was considered less important, making it alright to be less careful or timely in carrying it out. So oaths had been sworn by heaven, by the earth, by Jerusalem, even by the Temple or by the altar. In effect, a license to make great boasts and pretentious promises, without necessarily carrying them out.

Jesus cuts through these various classifications of oaths and their different value. Jesus points out that heaven, earth, Jerusalem, the Temple and altar were all God's own creation - thus all in truth involve God. They therefore must be as binding as those that expressly included the name of the Lord.

Some swore by their heads, meaning that their head is forfeit if they are not speaking the truth, or do not fulfill their promise. Jesus points to the inability of a man to change his hair color, whether white or black (before hair dye). Only God, who also created man, can control even the minutest detail in a person's life. Therefore to swear by one's head is also in effect swearing by God, in Whose hands we all are.

The highest path is to speak the truth from the heart. If this is done always then that person's word would be believed and accepted as true. Therefore no oath would be necessary. A person's "yes" would be dependable as would their "no". Anything further suggests an underlying desire to deceive - which comes from the evil one. This suggests that if a person uses many oaths during a conversation, they feel the need to prove their words to be true by so doing.

Jesus does not forbid making any oath, solemn vow or promise, in God's Name. Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph made promises with an oath. Jesus condemns the hypocritical, unnecessary, boasting types of oaths common at that time. Do people still do this? Are we still sinful? Truth is still truth.

Next, Retaliation.

Lesson X

Matthew 5:38-48. Retaliation.

38 ¶ Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth:
 39 but I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also.
 40 And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also.
 41 And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain.
 42 Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away.
 43 ¶ Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbor, and hate thine enemy.
 44 But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you;
 45 that ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust.
 46 For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same?
 47 And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? do not even the publicans so?
 48 Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.

Verses 38-42.

Again, "you have heard it said." Going back to Exodus we find the quote, "eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, stripe for stripe" (Exodus 21:24,25). Deuteronomy 19:21 includes "life for life". These were laws to be carried out by civil courts to prevent people from taking revenge. Justice was to be administered as a public responsibility. The punishments were to be done in public by the people. The death penalty was carried out by public stoning. Elsewhere, Scripture forbids repaying evil for evil, but instead waiting for Jehovah and He will save you. **(Rov? 20:22.)** The Pharisees on the contrary appealed to this law for their own purposes - for personal retribution and revenge.

The most important lesson that Jesus is trying to get across is to love your enemies. The opposite is to harbor hatred, resentment, suspicions, and an attitude of vindictiveness. To turn the other cheek is a dramatic act that truly shows the inner calm, peaceful, and loving attitude of that person. This person will also not resist the evil-doer but will act from a loving disposition.

The next example pictures a man being sued - to take away his shirt to pay for a debt. He is not to be resentful and contest the suit, but to give the shirt and the outer garment also (the robe). The point is that another's attitude or actions should not force us to become like them. The strength of our love of God and our neighbor, must continue to show itself in our actions.

This example had come to mean any authority that could compel someone to render any kind of service. One example was the Roman

Lesson X Continued

soldiers that compelled Simon of Cyrene to carry the cross for Jesus (Matthew 27:32). If a person is assigned to carry a load for one mile, then with a helpful and loving disposition they should carry it twice the distance required.

If someone needs any kind of help a person should be ready and willing to give the help needed. If someone needs some money, a person should be generous and seek no recompense or interest. All such should be looked upon as opportunities to share your blessings and your faith, as a representative of our Heavenly Father and His Son.

Verses 43-47. Love Your Enemies.

The contrast: "Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbor, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; that ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust. For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same? And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? do not even the publicans so?"

The traditional addition of "hate your enemy" by the rabbis had no basis from the Old Testament. The dropping of "as yourself" from "love your neighbor" lessened its extent, allowing wide interpretation. Neighbor in this combination did not extend beyond the Jew. The scribes and Pharisees also drew a line between themselves, the good and righteous sons of Abraham, and the publicans, sinners, and common rabble who neither knew nor attempted to follow the Law.

In the divisive and stratified social structure Jesus came to break down all these false and harmful traditions. All boundaries of race, party, descent, socio-economic class, age, sex, political position, vocation, etc. were set aside. Jesus was clearly and simply stating the fact that from God's point of view everyone was the neighbor of everyone else. Jesus illustrated this principle in the parable of the Good Samaritan. There was no need to ask the question: "Who is my neighbor?" (Luke 10:36.)

Indeed the law had provision to help your enemy in Exodus 23:4,5. If you find your enemy's stray donkey or ox, you must bring it back to him. If you see the donkey of one who hates you lying under the weight of its pack, you must help your enemy lift it up.

Jesus goes one final step further: from helping to loving. He was not requiring that we like or approve of what they are or do. Instead we must care about their salvation, and help them when they are in need. Jesus adds prayer as the normal and necessary way of showing love and concern for the eternal welfare of all people. To pray for those who persecute was also a new way to act. Both love and prayer for your enemies became a first in the world - taught and lived by Jesus. Just as Jesus showed the Father to man by His words and actions, He calls on everyone who by grace have accepted God's forgiveness, to imitate their Heavenly Father's actions by showing their thankfulness through loving their enemies.

Lesson X Continued

The illustration that God deals with evil and good, just and unjust, equally, by causing sunrise and rainfall on both, shows His love for mankind.

Verse 48.

This summarizes everything said thus far. "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect." Leviticus 19:2 says, "You shall be holy, for I Jehovah your God am holy." Also, Deuteronomy 18:13; Leviticus 11:44, 20:7. Jesus was not making a demand that was possible for anyone to actually achieve. Perfection is the goal to be strived for but not achievable in this life. It is in the exercise of showing love for all that we strive to become more like God. The love indicated should be patterned after that of God - that of compassion, patience, tenderness, praying, helping, reaching out.

Matthew 6:1-8. Devotion of the Heart to God.

1 Take heed that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them: otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in heaven.
 2 ¶ Therefore when thou doest thine alms, do not sound a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward.
 3 But when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth:
 4 that thine alms may be in secret: and thy Father which seeth in secret himself shall reward thee openly.
 5 ¶ And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are: for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward.
 6 But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly.
 7 ¶ But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking.
 8 Be not ye therefore like unto them: for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him.

Verse 1.

Righteousness is not to be practiced in public, to attract attention. To do so brings no reward from your Father in heaven. The motive of the heart is the true measure of a person's righteousness before God.

Jesus is speaking about the ethical practices of the true religion - more specifically: giving charity, prayer, and fasting.

Lesson X Continued

When these things are done for public attention, the attention itself is the reward - whatever praise, honor, respect, or admiration you receive. It also shows that the person is not doing these things to please and glorify God - therefore he or she is hypocritical.

First: charitable giving

Verse 2.

This must not be done as a public show (announced with the blast of a trumpet) such as a press conference, or on television. Some did so in synagogues, or wherever the poor were found in public, such as alleyways, in order to be admired. The Old Testament has many passages that demand giving to the poor: Exodus 23:10,11, 30:15; Leviticus 19:10; Deuteronomy 15:7-11.

In the sense Jesus intended, the inner motive of the heart must be to honor God. If done for honor from men, what they pretend to be giving freely is in fact being used to buy acclaim for themselves. Therefore their reward has already been received. No reward will be received from God.

Verse 3.

This charity should be done so naturally, without conscious record keeping, recounting, or remembering. The left hand is not aware of what the right hand is doing.

Verse 4.

God is aware of everything we do, and therefore, any such deeds He will see and reward. The idea of the good steward comes to mind.

Verse 5.

Prayer among the Jews was a daily observation. Morning, afternoon, and evening - set times (Daniel 6:10). The best place would be in the Temple in Jerusalem, if possible. Otherwise, a synagogue would be appropriate. If neither place were available, even in the street it was acceptable. To pray in private goes without saying. The point here, as in other subjects, is the motive of the heart.

Jesus is describing the practice of especially the Pharisee who placed himself at the front of the Temple so that everyone present could see him - then ostentatiously offering his prayer. This was done in synagogues and at the busiest street corners where they would plan to be at the exact moment, to be seen by the most people possible. They sought to be revered and admired by men, and that would be their only reward.

Lesson X Continued

Verse 6.

Now the right way to pray to our Heavenly Father. The emphasis is on personal, private communication. Jesus mentions a private room, with the door closed. This points to any place where one can withdraw - whether corner or closet - to pour out one's heart without an audience, or threat of interruption. This practice should not become a bragging point to convince others of one's devotion to God. To pray in secret brings the reward from the Father Who sees in secret. These include assurance of forgiveness and mercy, peace of heart and mind, trust that God's will is the best for his life.

Verse 7.

The amount of words said should never be the measure of being heard. Jesus describes pagans as babbling on and on, thinking that the more they say will improve the results. Also, Mark 12:40 mentions the scribes, "for a pretense make long prayers." Jesus doesn't condemn long prayers - except when the motive is wrong. The Catholic rosary prayer purpose comes to mind.

Verse 8.

The total truth is here. God already knows what we need even before we ask Him. We don't need to go into lengthy details of our situation or what we need. The point is mirrored in the picture of a child going to their earthly parents to ask for what they need. They already know, but want that child to come to them, that they may show their intimate love and concern for their child. In the same way, our Heavenly Father also desires His children to come to Him, pouring out their heart to Him, that He may bless them as His own.

Next, the Lord's Prayer.

Lesson XI

Matthew 6:9-15. The Way We Should Pray.

9 After this manner therefore pray ye:

Our Father which art in heaven,

Hallowed be thy name.

10 Thy kingdom come.

Thy will be done

in earth, as it is in heaven.

11 Give us this day our daily bread.

12 And forgive us our debts,

as we forgive our debtors.

13 And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen.

14 For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you:

15 but if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

Verse 9. The Lord's Prayer.

Introduction: it must be emphasized that Jesus is giving an example, the manner in which His disciples should pray. As follows from His previous teaching, He is not prescribing these following words to be repeated again and again as a liturgical form. Therein is the danger of empty formalism He has condemned. The key always is within the heart and mind of the one who prays. He does not forbid the repeating of these words, if the devotion of the worshipper is true. But, His teaching points to these words as a model or pattern of what our prayers should include.

Summary: the approximately 70 words of the prayer include 3 parts: first, calling upon God as our Heavenly Father,; second, three petitions concerning the glory of God, His Name, His reign, His will; third, human needs concerning bread, debts, and enemies. These encompass present (bread), past (debts), and future (enemies). The use of the plural forms "our" and thus includes our fellow believers as well as ourselves in every part.

The address: Our Father which art in heaven. This necessarily pertains only to those who have accepted His Fatherhood - those who have accepted the Redemption He offered through His only begotten Son. Those who have not, remain children of the devil (John 8:44; I John 3:10). That this prayer does not include the name of Jesus or Christ in no way detracts from the essential basis of the prayer. Apart from Christ, no one can come to the Father or claim Him as Father. (John 14:6.).

The term Our Father identifies He Who is the King of the Kingdom of Heaven, and at the same time the Father of its citizens. The citizens are His children, His family. As such we must consider Him near, that His attitude and concern for them is ever lasting love, that He will always be there and approachable. At the same time we are also aware that He is in heaven - that He reigns over the entire universe - and must be revered, respected, honored, and approached humbly. Thus our petitions rest on His will, His infinite wisdom, concerning even the smallest things in our lives. "Our Father in Heaven" also points to the fact that we are not yet at home with

Lesson XI Continued

the Father, but pilgrims on the way to that eternity. His desire as well as ours is for that time when we will be together.

First Petition - Hallowed Be Thy Name.

The one who prays is calling upon all creation, especially humanity, to hold God's Name in reverence, to show honor, and respect, and even more, to exalt and glorify His Name. All this is in acknowledgement of Him being the Creator of the universe, from the most finite to the infinite, Whose loving-kindness provides for and sustains all life on earth; Who also provides for our salvation - His mercy and grace shown in the gift of His Son. The call is upon everyone, everywhere, to also hold God's Name in such reverence and also lift their voices in praise to Him.

Verse 10.

Second Petition - Thy Kingdom Come.

As Jesus taught, the kingdom of heaven came individually when a person accepted His atonement. Through the Holy Spirit's indwelling they become a citizen, also accepting the rule of the Father. As each new believer comes, they add to His kingdom. Until Jesus comes again for His, this prayer is necessary as the Gospel is shared here and around the world. Those who are not His, are fervently working for their own kingdom to come.

This petition implies responsibility on our part - to spread the message in any way at our disposal, at any opportunity that comes to us. It also implies our desire to become better citizens. That we may know increasingly of the greatness of our Father in all His ways and especially about the glory of His salvation through the perfect life and substitutionary death of our Savior.

Third Petition - Thy Will Be Done, In Earth As It Is In Heaven.

Obviously, because of sin, God's will on earth is not even being attempted except by believers. In complete contrast, His Will is observed and obeyed constantly and continually in Heaven. The believers should ardently be praying for the Father's will to spread its influence and obedience on earth, working toward the perfection in Heaven. This will finally take place in the new heavens and new earth. Both Testaments record the many people that attempted to do God's will in their lives. The only perfect example was Jesus Himself. They also show that obedience to God's will is rewarded. Again, Jesus is the best example of that also.

Verse 11.

Now begin the petitions for human needs. As following the high calling of the previous three, now the necessities in man's attempts to carry them out.

Daily Bread: the portion of food needed for any one day. This includes moderation and humility. Moderation - not asking of luxury or overabundance. Humility is found in the asking, not for ourselves alone, but for "us". The point is trusting our Heavenly Father so that we need not fear or worry about tomorrow. God is sustaining the entire universe at all times, and He can provide for our physical needs.

Lesson XI Continued

Verse 12.

We must continually pray for forgiveness, for the simple reason that we continue to sin, every day. Part of that sin effects other people. The power to believe and the power to forgive are the gift of God through grace (unmerited favor). Being grateful for faith and His forgiveness, we must exercise both. The evidence of the life of our spirit with the Holy Spirit seeking to please the Father and follow His Will.

Upon receiving these gifts, we must share them - we must forgive those that sin against us. If we hold something against another - that (as Jesus previously taught) is a sin. We then must realize that sin, then forgive the other, and finally ask God to forgive us, even after we realized it and turned from it. We cannot be forgiven unless we forgive.

In other words, how can we ask God to forgive us for something we are holding against another, if we are still holding it against them? The sin must be past when we ask for forgiveness. This brings peace of heart and mind, so necessary for mental and spiritual health.

Verse 13.

The next petition speaks of the future - our need for safe guidance, and protective watching over. "And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil..." By prayer we must be continually watchful and careful in physical necessities. We must exercise due diligence to avoid giving in to our own weaknesses, no matter what comes at us.

Again, the plural "us" tells us to always included others in our prayers.

Verse 13 continued - "For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen."

There has been dispute about these words because they are not in some of the oldest manuscripts. It is generally agreed that they do offer a fitting close to the prayer, and agree with the whole tenor of the prayer and the teaching about God in both Testaments.

As Christ teaches us how to pray, these words well summarize the awe of the one who prays, upon communication and communion with God: for His is the kingdom, the power, and the glory - forever! "Amen" concludes the prayer with sincerity and conviction. What God has promised, He will carry out.

Verses 14,15.

The prayer now over, Jesus adds these words to further explain verse 12 (concerning forgiveness). In verse 12, sins were named debts - what we owe. Punishment follows if they are not paid. In this verse, however, they are called trespasses - deviations from correct conduct, stepping over the line. As previously, the one injured is responsible to forgive the one who inflicted injury, the other to ask the one injured for forgiveness. The ultimate goal is reconciliation, peace among men, which brings peace with God. If forgiveness is not given, the sin remains.

Lesson XI Continued

Matthew 6:16-21.

16 ¶ Moreover when ye fast, be not, as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance: for they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward.
 17 But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thine head, and wash thy face;
 18 that thou appear not unto men to fast, but unto thy Father which is in secret: and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly.
 19 ¶ Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal:
 20 but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal:
 21 for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

Verse 16.

Fasting was a personal choice to abstain from food for one or more specific religious reasons. One was to show sorrow over some sin that had been confessed - an act of humiliation. Another was lamentation over defeat in battle, loss of a loved one, and so forth. Overwhelming grief or anxiety does naturally cause loss of desire for food - a natural reason for those fasts of choice. Some fasts were observed by the nation for important religious events.

God's law only required one yearly fast, on the day of atonement. The practice had increased over the years. They were commonly from sunrise to sunset. If you follow their mention through the Old Testament, some were for seven days (I Samuel 31:13); 3 weeks (Daniel 10); 40 days (I Kings 19:8); 5th and 7th month (Zechariah 7:3-5). By the time of Jesus, the Pharisees observed a fast twice a week. (Luke 18:12.)

A voluntary fast of humiliation is the observance Jesus is questioning. The manner in which they made a public display by looking so sad - discoloring their faces (most likely with ashes) - was intended to make those that saw them consider them the sincerest and most pious and religious. Jesus calls them hypocrites. Their outward display was only that, and did not show the true condition of their minds and hearts. Their reward was also outward - whatever acclaim they received from the public. They found no favor with God. This was the negative side.

Verse 17.

Now the positive. Jesus does not tell His disciples whether or not to fast. Under specific circumstances it was perfectly acceptable. His advice was to observe it without any outward sign, so that it would not even be noticed: to prepare he hair, and wash the face. The fast was for a religious purpose and therefore dedicated to God alone. It was no one else's business.

Verse 18.

The reward from God is in secret as the fasting also was. The whole thrust remains the attitude of mind and heart. Our relationship with our Heavenly Father is personal, and must be sincere, like that

Lesson XI Continued

of a child. A person still has the choice to abstain from eating for religious purposes - sorrow, or over a destructive situation, or to concentrate in prayer. (Fasting thus prevents interruption or distraction.) But neither should ever be done for public notice.

Verses 19,20. Where is your treasure gathered?

First Jesus tells the people how foolish it is to gather earthly treasure because it is so perishable. He mentions the moth that eats through the finest of clothing, rust that in a similar way eats up metal - both become useless. These examples begin the line of thought that all earthly things corrode, break down, wear out. This includes the effects of disease, violent weather, natural disasters and so on. Not only that, but also what other men can do to steal your treasures, to affect your finances. They can break into your home for your goods. They can cheat you in a deal, add taxation, inflation, bank failure, etc. When put in this way, to trust in earthly security seems unreasonable.

The positive advice Jesus gives is a complete contrast to the previous situation. Treasures in heaven are not susceptible to earthly forces that destroy earthly things. Heavenly treasure is reserved for us there. They are blessings which we can have only a foretaste of here on earth. Among them are forgiveness, answered prayer, our name in the Lamb's Book of life, the Father's love and constant care, Christ's love, peace, joy, and victory (John 16:33), the fullness of the indwelling Spirit, and so forth.

Verse 21.

Where your treasure is, there will be your heart also. The question remains as essential today. Are all your thinking, working and desiring focused on building your own earthly kingdom? Or are all the resources you possess deemed temporary and to be used for the up building of God's kingdom which, in this world, resides in the hearts and minds of fellow believers in His Holy and Precious Son, Jesus our Salvation?

Next the Eye, God, and Mammon

Lesson XII

Matthew 6:22-34. The Eye, God, and Mammon.

22 ¶ The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light.

23 But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!

24 ¶ No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.

25 ¶ Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment?

26 Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they?

27 Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature?

28 And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin:

29 and yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.

30 Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?

31 Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed?

32 (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things.

33 But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.

34 ¶ Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.

Verses 22,23.

Jesus describes the eye as the part of the body that brings light. This allows the person to see what is outside and make choices as to action, and safety. The condition of the eye must be healthy or else its poor condition will not allow the person to judge what is outside and make the best choices. The worse the condition - the greater the effect of darkness. Also, even if the brightest sunshine is without, the diseased eye would gain no benefit. Transfer this idea to the spiritual. If a person's mind and heart are healthy, then the light of God can illumine that person's life, guiding their choices to fit in with God's will. If they are not healthy, they will be limited by their darkness, and their choices will be dark, earthly, full of sin and selfishness.

Verse 24.

This is a clear and concise statement of the impossibility of anyone to pursue two opposite ways of life. The word Mammon (of uncertain derivation) personifies the whole world of earthly riches,

Lesson XII Continued

property, position, and pleasures. God's calling is the opposite, the life dedicated to serving God and his fellow man. Whatever this person may have materially will be used for God's glory, not their own. Jesus emphasizes that it is impossible for anyone to follow both paths. The path chosen reveals a worship - either of God, or the idol, Mammon.

Even if a person begins by thinking they can follow both paths, will at some point show love for the one and hatred of the other. They will become devoted to the one and also looking down on the other.

An example of a dramatic change in one person's life is seen in the contrast of Paul before and after conversion to Christ. From persecutor and proud possessor of family, position, material comfort, to preacher, persecuted, giving up all worldly comforts for the sake of spreading the Gospel. Obviously, everyone has the same choice.

Verse 25.

Jesus goes on to show that the most important choice is to see the most important priority in life - to trust in our Heavenly Father as The Creator and Sustainer of the universe, Who cares for each part, and more specifically, His human children. He holds all life in His hands.

The question: are you going to spend most of your time worrying about your life, what you're going to eat or drink or wear? To do so is to miss the spiritual life, living for God and trusting Him for the rest.

Being anxious is a bad habit, which Jesus says to stop. The word anxious indicates being distracted.

Verse 26.

Jesus now uses a new example to show how needless and unreasonable worry is: the birds we see flying in the air. They have no ability to sow, reap, or gather into barns, yet God provides food for them. Are people of more value than they or not?

The birds cannot truly plan ahead - but do work hard to find food, make nests, migrate, etc. No time is wasted worrying. Men do also work at providing food, shelter, and other necessities, but some spend much of that time worrying, distracted from life's true values. Jesus does not criticize making provision for the future, but the uselessness of anxiety.

Verse 27.

This is pointed out in a saying - by all your anxiety, can you increase your lifespan by even the smallest distance? The word (helikia) from Greek may refer to lifespan or height (stature). Since the previous teaching concerning the focus of life on the future - the increase in stature seems off the point. The point remains the same - worry cannot do either.

Verses 28,29.

Jesus now turns to the subject of clothing. Why be anxious? Even Solomon in all his luxury did not have clothing as beautiful as the lilies of the field. They did not work, sew, or spin, for their

Lesson XII Continued

beautiful covering. It must be noted that no man could produce clothing as beautiful as God's creation, nor could any man create a flower.

Verse 30.

The following argument, or proof: God provides flowers for the plants of the field for a season, then when dead and dried, they are used to heat a furnace. How much more important are you men, though your faith is small? Because you are His children, He will surely provide what you need. To worry about clothing is a sign of little faith. That this could be true while Christ is with them shows their slowness of mind and heart to believe and accept the supernatural presence, power and love of the Son of God among men.

Verse 31.

A summary of the foolishness and selfishness of worrying and fretting about what one is going to eat, drink, or wear.

Verse 32.

For Gentiles, these things are their highest pursuits in life - craving the finest, most satisfying material things. For them, this is natural because they don't know God and the spiritual realities of His care. Those who know God as Father should not be worried about these same concerns - because their Heavenly Father not only knows what they need but also cares, and will provide. The believer must rest in those promises, trusting that God will fulfill them. This leaves no place for doubt, concern, anxiety, or worrying. He knows even before we ask.

Verse 33.

So, what is our first priority as believers that will place us in the proper habits of living and attitude, so that we leave no place for anxiety?

"But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you."

Seek means a diligent and purposeful search, dedicated to finding, without distraction or hesitation. The goal is God as king in one's life, which naturally and necessarily includes His righteousness. We enter His kingdom by grace through faith. Through Christ we are forgiven and accounted righteous. Yet, since we are still sinful and weak, we must strive to become, through the necessary help of the indwelling Spirit, to become more like the Son.

We are to love and seek to follow God and His will in our lives. We are also to share our faith and forgiveness, and love, and goods with our fellow man. In such a life, working out our salvation, all things needful, in abundance, will be provided by our Heavenly Father, Who wishes to bless His children.

Verse 34.

The conclusion - it is pointless to be anxious for tomorrow. Take care today of what today demands, for the next day will have enough demands for our complete attention.

Lesson XII Continued

A touch of humor? "Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof." In other words, "each day has enough trouble all by itself."

Lamentations 3:22,23: "His compassions fail not. They are new every morning; great is thy faithfulness!"

Matthew 7:1-11. How the Righteous Are to Treat Their Fellow Man.

1 Judge not, that ye be not judged.

2 For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again.

3 And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye?

4 Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, Let me pull out the mote out of thine eye; and, behold, a beam is in thine own eye?

5 Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye.

6 ¶ Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend you.

7 ¶ Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you:

8 for every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.

9 Or what man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone?

10 Or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent?

11 If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?

Verse 1.

The passing of judgment. Jesus is not condemning the thoughtful forming of an opinion concerning a person's words or deeds, or even expressing this opinion.

The main idea is against the self-righteous, condemning spirit that, without love or mercy, seeks the harm of others. The common practice (especially seen in the Pharisees) of finding and condemning real or made up faults in others, while totally ignoring their own, is also common during all times. Jesus warns that anyone who practices this will eventually find themselves facing judgment - if not by man, then certainly by God.

Verse 2.

This emphasizes that whatever measure you use to judge others, will also be used to judge you. If you judge others without mercy, so will you also be judged. If you use kindness and forbearance, you

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will be rewarded. Judgment or reward can take place by human action, but will certainly come from God. Verses 3-5.

This is an illustration of the kind of mindset that chooses to judge others. The contrast is between two things - a beam and a mote (or speck). A person's vision is described as focused on the smallest particle in someone else's eye, while there is a beam in his or her own eye. Since a beam is a large piece of timber, one has to wonder how that person can even see around or past it. Yet, that person is only focused on someone else and his or her speck.

Jesus suggests that ignoring a beam in one's own eye can only be by choice, and calls people who do this hypocrites. Jesus calls the scribes and Pharisees this because they "trusted in themselves that they were righteous and who despised all others." (Luke 18:9.) Even believers are liable to this weakness - with a self-righteous attitude of pride to play the one who finds the tiniest fault in others. If the beam (pride) is removed, then a person can clearly see the small misstep of another. Then, in a loving way, they bring it to another's attention. This person will also be aware of their own weakness and guard against temptation in the same area as another. Self discipline and disciplining others are expected in the Christian life, for the benefit of all, to the glory of God. In these verses Jesus refers to "brothers".

Verse 6.

In the following verse, the reference is to dogs and hogs. Among the Jews, it was common to see street dogs that prowled around, especially for garbage and rubbish discarded in the street. They were savage and filthy. It was considered a special curse to be devoured by dogs (I Kings 14:11).

Hogs are considered filthy and repulsive. It was against the law to eat swine. (Leviticus 11:7; Deuteronomy 14:8.)

Jesus forbids giving what is holy to the dogs, and what is very precious (pearls) before hogs. He is describing things of God, of the utmost value, that must not be given to the class of humankind that have attributes similar to the described animals. This points to a limit of the offering of the Gospel message. When met with resistance and continual rejection, the messenger must move on.

We remember Christ's directions when sending out the disciples on a missionary tour, He told them to leave any place that would not welcome them. If resisted, they must shake the dust from themselves as a witness of judgment against that place.

With regard to the hogs, Jesus goes even further - depicting the ultimate danger of being killed. There is the picture of throwing pearls to the swine, who in attempting to eat them, are unable to, become enraged, and trample them. They in turn furiously charge and tear to pieces those who had brought the pearls.

Sensitivity and wisdom are necessary in sharing the most

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valuable, holy, and loving message of Salvation.

Verses 7,8.

After describing all of the responsibilities man has in relation to God and his fellow man, Jesus now gives us the way that will give us God's help, guidance, power, and wisdom to enable us to work at accomplishing a fruitful and holy life.

He asks us to do three things: ask, seek, and knock. And the promises: if you ask it will be given; if you seek, you shall find; if you knock, it shall be opened.

Asking: usually one in need approaches someone that is able to fulfill that need. In this case, a sinner asks his personal God - One that can respond to his need. Thus faith of the child of God in his Heavenly Father. This is expressed in prayer.

Seeking: this goes a step further, but may include asking. It requires action, movement. To try to live in God's will, we must pray for guidance, and then act out what we know and work at finding out more on our path.

Knocking: this includes asking, seeking, then keeping at it - perseverance. One knocks until the door is opened.

The promise is exact and certain as to the response: given, found, opened.

Jesus now illustrates the message with a direct, natural, and everyday example.

Verses 9-11.

How do earthly fathers act toward their own children? If the child asks for food, would the parent give something inedible, such as a stone? If the child asks for meat (a fish), would the parent give them something dangerous (a serpent)? Obviously not. Parents know how to give good and necessary gifts to their children.

In contrast, how much more will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask Him. He does not say He will give whatever we desire. Just as the earthly child asks for daily need (food), he is given those needs.

Our Heavenly Father also desires His children to ask Him for their daily needs. Compared to the earthly parent, He will certainly give much more, and always good things. It is not possible in each of our lives to truly recognize how many good things He blesses us with each and every day. If we could know, it would astound us.

His love and tender care are past understanding. We need to be constantly thankful and appreciative, and continue to persevere in asking in prayer, seeking what is best, and knocking until the door is opened to our needs. We need to be thankful continually.

Lesson XIII

Matthew 7:12-23. The Golden Rule.

12 Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets.

13 ¶ Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat:

14 because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.

15 ¶ Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves.

16 Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?

17 Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit.

18 A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit.

19 Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.

20 Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them.

21 ¶ Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.

22 Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works?

23 And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.

Verse 12.

The Golden Rule - the guide by which one can judge the best course of action in any situation with another person.

"Whatever you want people to do for you, do so also for them..."

Do unto others as you would have them do unto you. In the context of what has gone before, Jesus is explaining the expected response of every believer who has accepted God's salvation and has become His child. That child is expected to share whatever they have received from God with their fellow man - even to the point of loving their enemies.

This is not suggested as being possible apart from God's love, only in response to have received it unto overflowing. To fulfill this command is only possible with guidance, strength, and power, from God. As one wishes for their neighbor to love them, so one must act in a loving manner towards that neighbor. The out flowing of God's love must pass through the believer to all those around them. Christ has already explained that this must also include one's enemies, so the idea of neighbor includes everyone.

The human rule is to treat others exactly as they treat you. If they treat you well, be suspicious, as there must be an ulterior (and selfish) motive. If they treat you harshly, the best recourse is to treat them worse, to try to convince them to stop treating you that way. They will continue to get back more than they give out. To

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break this tradition takes strength and love beyond what comes naturally.

Verses 13,14.

Now Jesus goes on to urge His listeners (and later His readers) to come into God's kingdom. He has described the citizens, their relation to God, their blessedness, and how they relate to the world. Also, the righteousness God grants and the expected response to be worked out in their daily lives.

He describes the path to be taken by the believer, contrasted with the one that leads to destruction. The descriptions of the paths show the difference in difficulties. The believer's gate is narrow and few are those who find it. Though the blessing and benefits of choosing this gate are great and eternal, yet on earth there will be persecution from the world in every form, and at the same time, they will be expected to live a life of prayer, loving others, and always telling the truth. Also they must not associate with people that might tempt or harm them.

To enter the narrow gate brings the greatest of all spiritual rewards. It is also a difficult way to live in this world. The way is narrow and must be sought. Only one drawn by the Spirit will seek this path, away from the noise and commotion of the self-seeking crowd on the path to destruction.

Verse 15.

Beware, on your path, of enemies: who are false prophets, disguised as harmless. They are actually destroyers - like a wolf in sheep's clothing. The contrast with a true prophet of God is extreme. God's messenger only spoke the truth revealed to them by God. A false prophet is self-appointed and claims to speak for God, but actually is speaking his own lies.

'To beware of' literally means 'hold your minds away from'. In Revelation there is one identified as "the false prophet", "like a lamb but speech like a dragon". An agent of darkness with the appearance of an angel of light. Any message that leads away from the truth as recorded in the Bible must be regarded as false. These lies may be popular; they may seem logical or reasonable according to popular belief or modern culture.

Examples: evolution which denies the Creator; situation ethics and labeling what in God's view is a sin as only an alternate choice, a disease, or natural conditioning - which blames the parents or the environment. These lies try to destroy the conscience and the recognition of sin for what it is and does. It allows a person to blame their choices and condition on anything but themselves.

This destroys any chance they would have had to realize their need of a Savior. This in turn pushes people on the wide path to destruction. Because this is the intention of the false prophet, they are described with a violent adjective - ravenous. This suggests malice, cunning, without mercy, attacking and devouring its prey. We must be on guard against any such people - whether preachers, scientists, doctors, politicians, etc. that speak distortions or half truths that lead away from God's Truth.

Lesson XIII Continued

Verses 16-20.

How are we to recognize these false prophets? It will not be by appearance. The best way is to judge what their lives produce. Jesus uses the examples from plants to make the point easy to understand and picture. This would be familiar to everyone's natural experience.

The first two examples: grapes are not picked from thorns, or figs from thistles. It is most obvious that good fruit (grapes and figs) cannot be found on the prickly and useless weeds mentioned. That is recognized by everyone. Just so, one does not expect to find God's love, truth, and forgiveness in those whose lives have the same characteristics as the thorn and thistle. From such we must stay away.

Even if we come across a fruit tree, we must observe its fruit in order to evaluate the tree. The good fruit we seek must be healthy, good to eat, good for the body. This we can accept as from God. Only a healthy tree can bear healthy fruit. On the other hand, if we come across a tree with sickly (and therefore worthless and harmful) fruit, we will also know that the tree is sickly and worthless. This tree must be cut down and burned.

We must evaluate everyone who claims to speak for God, or to speak the truth. We do so by watching what they say and how they live. If they claim to love others and wish to help them, do they also share their time and goods? Or are they selfish and building up their own kingdom here and now?

A false prophet may keep up a good front for a little while, but in the end their true motives will be seen. What is in one's heart will eventually come out. As John Calvin wrote, "Nothing is more difficult than to counterfeit virtue." We have seen this truth revealed in the lives of several televangelists.

The cutting down and being thrown in to the fire of the fruitless trees is mentioned in several places in both Testaments. They all indicate the final judgment where the wicked will be burned with unquenchable fire that has been prepared for them and also for the devil and his followers. Jesus closes this thought by reminding us to be aware of such persons' fruit, whether their talk is from God, and whether their lives reflect that. If not, we must stay away from them.

This point is to be driven home more forcefully in the following verses because Jesus speaks of the final judgment. The emphasis is the contrast between those who only say, and those that do.

Verses 21-23.

The sayers are the ones that come before Jesus saying "Lord, Lord" and then brag about all they have done in His Name. This alone won't allow entrance into the kingdom of heaven. Those who have truly entered God's kingdom will share their faith and be about the Father's business. In other words they will put into practice the revealed will of God in their daily lives.

The false prophet, as in the preceding verses (16-20), is a hypocrite. Even if they proclaim the truth, but their lives do not match, the onlooker can only conclude that that person does not believe what they had spoken, or otherwise would follow that belief

Lesson XIII Continued

in their daily lives. Thus the onlooker must draw the conclusion that what the person truly believed was what their lives showed, and that what they said was the lie.

These false prophets could lead many astray. They could be described as destroyers, blind guides, false witnesses, ravenous wolves. We remember that John the Baptist and Jesus, on many occasions, had openly accused the scribes and Pharisees of this.

Because of this danger, we must examine ourselves as well as others. Do we speak God's truth and try to live out God's will in our lives? Or do we speak nicely and then rule our own lives as if we were the king building our own kingdom? In other words, do we - and others - talk about love and forgiveness, and giving, and then act selfishly, unforgiving, unfriendly, greedy, and proud?

In the description of the accused, standing before the Judge, they address Him as "Lord, Lord." Thus they are appealing to His Name as if this proves that they had accepted Him and had communication and communion with Him. They claimed their deeds were done in His Name as if He had approved, while actually they used His Name like a magic word for their own selfish reasons: to show off, to see if it worked, to receive attention or acclaim. As Jesus had already taught, things done from any such motives would receive no reward from God.

Jesus does not dispute their claim of doing mighty works in His Name. They may or may not be telling the whole truth or part of the truth. The point is that their hearts and minds did not belong to God. Their deeds, though good, came from selfish and ungodly hearts and minds. God may have honored the deed, just because His Son's Name was used, but He did not honor those who used it selfishly.

The verdict follows - "And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity." though Jesus knows all about these people, He speaks about their never coming to Him by faith, accepting His love and salvation. They never had fellowship with Him. They had never been His. They had never surrendered their hearts and lives to Him. They had despised the commandments of God.

Even this early in His ministry Jesus is revealing Himself as God's Son (by calling God His Father), and describing His future role as Judge of all men. This will be revealed in greater detail in Matthew 25:31, and also in Revelation 20:11-15.

Verses 24-27. Conclusion of the Sermon.

The Parable of the Two Builders.

24 ¶ Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock:

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25 and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock.

26 And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand:

27 and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it.

The person who has listened to what Jesus preached and then puts it into practice is like the sensible man who builds his house on rock. Thus his house withstood rain, flood, and wind. As before, Jesus depicts two choices that each person is faced with. By their choice, they put themselves in one of the two categories.

In this illustration, both men are building a house. We can assume they were in a similar location. It has been suggested that it was in a valley that had a watercourse that was dry most of the year. However, it had a stormy rain season with severe testing and the possibility of flood. The sensible man must have planned ahead by digging down to rock to place his house's foundation. The foolish builder built on the surface (loose gravel) thinking that sunny days will always be there.

The parable represents how a person builds their life. The wise builder starts on the Rock foundation of Jesus (the Rock of Ages) and adds his house as in life his words and deeds, built on that sure foundation. It will stand through whatever testing and tribulation comes against him.

The foolish man built his life on his own selfish and sinful foundation. When he faces storms of troubles, he has nothing to stand on and will be destroyed. This is like his house that fell, crashed into the flood and was finally washed away.

This also speaks of the Last Judgment: those who heard the Gospel and accepted it, and lived out their lives accordingly will never have to fear, both in this life or hereafter. Those who hear but do not follow this Gospel will suffer loss in this life and destruction after the judgment.

That this description of the foolish man is at the end of the sermon suggests that Jesus wanted to impress upon His listeners (and those that would hear or read it later) the importance of His message - and the equal importance of their choices. They had two choices: life eternal through His love, and forgiveness, and sacrifice; or to choose their own way - which He has so clearly warned them about. It leads to ruin and destruction. This was a serious urging that they must repent, and choose life.

Each person living today still has to choose, a choice that lasts forever.

Lesson XIII Continued

Verses 28,29.

28 ¶ And it came to pass, when Jesus had ended these sayings, the people were astonished at his doctrine:

29 for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.

Matthew closes his record of the Sermon by describing the effects of His words on those who had listened. The Amplified New Testament gives more forcefully the idea of the word 'astounded': "astonished and overwhelmed with bewildered wonder." The literal meaning: "struck out of their senses." This had more than a momentary impact.

Why this dramatic reaction? To put aside the great value of Jesus' presence, dignity, and seriousness, yet loving manner can only be imagined. We must consider the effects of His words - they were clear, direct, and about the most serious issues of life, death and eternity. He spoke with authority, as one who speaks from God, therefore speaks only the truth. The source of His words He clearly says came from His Heavenly Father. His words were also based on many passages of Scripture, which to some extent, His hearers would be familiar with.

This was in contrast to the lengthy rambling of the scribes and Pharisees, often about trivialities and various opinions of rabbis and other questionable sources, often with misleading reasoning and confusion.

Jesus spoke the truth from the Creator of the Universe Who cannot lie. He created everything so that only He knows all of the Truth. Jesus spoke the Truth on earth and now holds the worlds together by the word of His power. There is no firmer foundation, both now and forever more. Amen.

Lesson XIV

Matthew 8:1-17. Series of Early Miracles.

- 1 When he was come down from the mountain, great multitudes followed him.
- 2 And, behold, there came a leper and worshipped him, saying, Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean.
- 3 And Jesus put forth his hand, and touched him, saying, I will; be thou clean. And immediately his leprosy was cleansed.
- 4 And Jesus saith unto him, See thou tell no man; but go thy way, show thyself to the priest, and offer the gift that Moses commanded, for a testimony unto them.
- 5 ¶ And when Jesus was entered into Caper'na-um, there came unto him a centurion, beseeching him,
- 6 and saying, Lord, my servant lieth at home sick of the palsy, grievously tormented.
- 7 And Jesus saith unto him, I will come and heal him.
- 8 The centurion answered and said, Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldest come under my roof: but speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed.
- 9 For I am a man under authority, having soldiers under me: and I say to this man, Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh; and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth it.
- 10 When Jesus heard it, he marveled, and said to them that followed, Verily I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel.
- 11 And I say unto you, That many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven:
- 12 but the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.
- 13 And Jesus said unto the centurion, Go thy way; and as thou hast believed, so be it done unto thee. And his servant was healed in the selfsame hour.
- 14 ¶ And when Jesus was come into Peter's house, he saw his wife's mother laid, and sick of a fever.
- 15 And he touched her hand, and the fever left her: and she arose, and ministered unto them.
- 16 When the even was come, they brought unto him many that were possessed with devils: and he cast out the spirits with his word, and healed all that were sick:
- 17 that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaiah the prophet, saying, Himself took our infirmities, and bare our sicknesses.

Intro - it has been noted that Matthew has arranged his writing around themes rather than a strictly chronological account. Thus the Sermon on the Mount was an extended sample of Christ's preaching. Now Matthew begins his recording of several early miracles without any chronology. After Christ's preaching and teaching, Matthew shows us Christ's deeds. Both word and deed must show what is within - the truth of God, that He carries out in His own life: one of love, forgiveness, healing, and relief, all to glorify the Father.

Lesson XIV Continued

Verse 1.

When Jesus came down from the mountain, large crowds accompanied Him. Those that heard Him did not want to immediately leave His presence. Luke 7:1 mentions that He was on the way to Capernaum. At some point the following miracle occurred.

Verse 2.

A leper came up and knelt before Him, and said, Lord, if you will, you can cleanse me.

The word leprosy comes from the Greek 'lepos' meaning scale. This describes outwardly observable manifestation of the disease. What begins with pain and numbness, then continues as the skin, in spots, loses color, thickens, and becomes scaly. Because of the poor circulation of blood, the spots become open sores. Skin around the eyes swells and sags in deep furrows. Fingers or toes may drop off. There is an unpleasant odor. Often, It affects the larynx, making the voice hoarse.

In scripture, the leper is considered ceremonially unclean. This prevents the leper from having any social or religious contact with other people. Leprosy was well known to be contagious. Also it was known to be incurable. The rabbis considered curing a leper as impossible as raising the dead.

The leper was an outcast and looked down upon as repulsive. It was also a common opinion that the leper was being punished with the disease because of some evil, or violent deed. They were considered cursed by God, and to be avoided at all costs.

The surprise here is twofold. The leper comes right up to Jesus, and Jesus does not seek to move away from him. The man drops to his knees, showing complete submission and reverence to Jesus. Luke says in 5:12 that he fell on his face, and that he was full of leprosy. He expresses complete faith in Christ's ability to cure him. He puts complete trust in Christ's will.

Jesus will do what is best for Him. He includes the request for healing (cleansing). He accepts Jesus as his Lord. It is obvious that this man was led to this faith by whatever he had seen and heard from Jesus, and/or what others may have related to him. No detail is recorded.

Verse 3.

The response. Jesus did not hesitate in reaching out His hand to touch the afflicted man. He said, "I will; be thou clean." That there was healing power in His touch is most obvious. Mark mentions that Jesus was "moved with compassion," (Mark 1:41). This was no magic; this was divine power released by the love of Jesus for this one in desperate need.

And immediately his leprosy was cleansed. As if a bright light was brought into a dark room, every shadow was dispelled, and every shadow of the disease was gone - only health remained. No amount of darkness can dispel or overpower the light. The opposite is true.

Verse 4.

Jesus asked him not to waste time telling others about this

Lesson XIV Continued

miracle. The most important thing was to show himself as cleansed (healed) to the priest, and bring the offering Moses prescribed as a testimony. This shows that Jesus called upon the one He healed to follow the Mosaic Law. It was also the quickest path for the man to reenter society and have all the benefits, including worshipping in the Temple. Jesus did not wish to become known as only a miracle worker and have people only seeking signs and wonders - just a big show. The miracles were only to prove the truth of His message - The Gospel of the Kingdom of God.

Verses 5,6. The Centurion's Servant Healed.

This takes place upon Jesus' entering Capernaum. A centurion approaches Him. He is a Gentile, an officer in the Roman army, which rules over Israel. Yet he has come to Jesus for help. He pleads for his servant-boy, who was bedridden with paralysis, and suffering terribly. Obviously he had heard what Jesus had done for others and hoped for help in spite of the fact that he was a soldier of the occupation of Israel. He cared enough for this boy that he asked even though Jesus might refuse him because he was not a Jew.

Verse 7.

Jesus says to Him, I will come and heal him.

Verse 8.

This immediate and positive reply seems to overwhelm the centurion. He calls himself unworthy of having Jesus enter his house (to come under his roof). He obviously revered Jesus as a man of God (the Jewish God) and endowed with special power and authority from God. He also recognized the impropriety of a Gentile asking a Jew to enter his home as forbidden by Jewish Law. To do so would defile the Jew.

The soldier then proceeds to explain how this would be unnecessary. Accordingly he states that all Jesus has to do is speak the word and his boy would be cured. He explains his reasoning: he is a military man under authority, who must obey his superiors, and those under him must obey his orders. When he tells one to go, or to come, they do so. When he tells his slave to do this, he does it. He accepted that Jesus had the authority and power to order the illness to go and it would do so. That was all that was needed.

Verse 10.

Now when Jesus heard this, He was amazed. He said to those accompanying Him, I solemnly declare to you, with no one in Israel have I found such faith.

The crowds that gathered around Jesus had to see to believe (though many saw and held on to their unbelief). This non-Jew had grasped the spiritual truth of Jesus' power and authority. No proximity or actual touch was necessary. Because of the man's compassion and love for his servant, he reached out to the One, who he had come to believe, had God's love and compassion for anyone in such dire need, and would certainly bring healing, and relief of suffering.

Lesson XIV Continued

Verses 11,12.

Jesus here describes the situation of the eternal state, in God's kingdom where Gentiles from east and west of Israel will be at the table with the greatest patriarchs of Israel, even Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. And many natural Jews who were to be sons of the Kingdom of God, because of their unbelief will be cast out unto the most distant darkness.

This is as predicted in many passages of both Testaments. It has continued to be true, as people from all nations, races, creeds, and customs have accepted Christ's Salvation. The Jews have continued to maintain their race - and since 1948, their nation - in unbelief. Though many Jews have come to know Jesus as their Messiah, the majority have not, and also have not remained orthodox in the Jewish faith. Yet, God is not finished with the Jews and their nation, as many Scriptures prophecy concerning their future (especially in Revelation).

The closing observation about those in outer darkness - "There shall be weeping and grinding of teeth." This is extreme expression of utter hopelessness, the loss of everything from earthly life and the hope of heaven, of all light, love, enjoyment, companionship. The grinding of teeth comes from frustration, anger, pain, and remorse, as well as the realization that it will never end.

These words were directed toward all those within hearing range. These were depictions of the ultimate destinations of all people. Everyone, whether Jew or Gentile, has a choice. There was no virtue in being born a Jew, no guaranteed salvation. The only value of either was to have faith in God and the One He sent to spread the Gospel of Salvation by word and deed before all men.

Everyone must realize that the choice here and now would be for all eternity. The description of the fate of the unbeliever should waken even the dullest conscience to the importance of avoiding such a fate. The contrast of sitting down at a banquet with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob should provide a picture of blessing, joy, peace, harmony, fellowship, and a great honor.

Jesus used this example of faith to show that this man had chosen the correct path of faith and would inherit the eternal kingdom of God. The depiction of the other fate was a dire warning of the consequences of not making the right choice, but pursuing one's own greedy, self-serving, Godless, and evil ways. Everyone has been warned. Everyone has heard the description of this very certain dark destination. There will be no excuses, no appeals, no delays, no pardon, no way out.

Verse 13.

Jesus then turns to the centurion and tells him to go home: as he believed, so has it been done for him. His boy was cured that very moment. As the man had believed, so Jesus performed - by

Lesson XIV Continued

speaking the word that the boy was healed.

Verse 14.

They were now at Peter's home in Capernaum. It seems like this took place only a little time after the preceding healing. Upon arrival at Peter's home, Jesus saw Peter's mother-in-law laid up with a severe fever.

Obviously Peter was married. Paul would later mention that his wife went with Peter on his missionary journeys (I Corinthians 9:5). Mark mentions that his brother, Andrew, also lives there. Mark also mentions that James and John were along on this visit.

Believers have no special exemption from earthly infirmities or death. God does often heal them, especially in answer to prayer. Otherwise, God provides comfort and peace.

Verse 15.

One touch of the Master's hand and the fever left her. The mother-in-law immediately felt strong enough, and thankful, so she waited on Him.

Verse 16.

The news had spread quickly throughout the area and later in the evening many who were demon-possessed and had all manner of illnesses came to Him. He cast out the evil spirits with a word, and healed all of the sick. Satan's power was broken by the power and authority of the Son of God. By His word, the demons had to leave those they were tormenting. All illness was healed - no matter how severe or humanly incurable: such is the power of God.

Verse 17.

This is recognized as a fulfillment of the prophecy of Isaiah 53:4:

He has taken our infirmities upon himself
and carried our diseases.

Isaiah had been given a view of Christ's voluntary suffering in our place. It was because He was to suffer and die for the sins of humanity that He could take away people's suffering. His love, compassion, and sympathy truly felt their disease and pain in a way no one else could.

"He was wounded for our transgressions; He was bruised for our iniquities."

Lesson XIV Continued

His love for all people in need had no limit, no exceptions no boundaries. Nor does He here, now, today. His love and care for us is constant and more certain than anything in this world. We must continue to live in thankfulness and gratitude and share this message with others. Amen.

Next, Discipleship.

Lesson XV

Matthew 8:18-22. Discipleship.

18 ¶ Now when Jesus saw great multitudes about him, he gave commandment to depart unto the other side.

19 And a certain scribe came, and said unto him, Master, I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest.

20 And Jesus saith unto him, The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head.

21 And another of his disciples said unto him, Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father.

22 But Jesus said unto him, Follow me; and let the dead bury their dead.

Verse 18.

On another evening Jesus commands that He and His disciples must go to the other side of the Sea of Galilee. As at other times, Jesus, in His human nature, needed rest, sleep, and prayer, to refresh and regroup. The disciples had these needs, even more than Jesus did.

Verse 19.

Before the journey, a certain scribe came up and said, "Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go." This group had usually been against Jesus. This teacher had obviously accepted Jesus as his own teacher. We assume his sincerity in making this statement directly to Jesus. In response Jesus must let this man know the cost - the other side of all the miracles, the large crowds, the acclaim.

Verse 20.

Jesus told him that foxes have dens in the ground, the birds have nests, but the Son of man has nowhere to lay his head. These common animals had their own homes they could return to for rest and safety. Jesus, on the other hand, went from place to place. Progressively, Jesus is made more and more unwelcome in place after place, until there was no place of safety. Ultimately He was not allowed to even remain alive on earth. This man must count the cost - what he will be called upon to give up - everything, even unto death. We are not told about the scribes' response.

This is the first use of the term 'Son of Man' in the New Testament. Certain implications must be mentioned: a great many books and scholarly articles have been written on this term. This term is first found in Psalms 8:4. It first refers to man - possibly referring to all of his offspring (born with a sinful nature).

In Ezekiel, he is addressed as "son of man" (Ezekiel 2:1 etc.). The emphasis is on weakness, and frailty, and utter dependence on God. This is not the emphasis that we find in Christ's use of the term. Undoubtedly His use comes from the prophecy of the Messiah in Daniel 7:13, "behold, with the clouds of heaven there was one coming, like a son of man..." This refers to Jesus ascending to heaven to sit at the Father's right hand where He was given power, glory, and authority over all nations, forever. The description in Daniel becomes the title in the Gospels - both referring to the same person

Lesson XV Continued

- the One Who became a man to save His people from their sins, which they had no power to do themselves.

In general terms, indicated by the context in several passages, it points to Christ's humiliation: born in a manger, having no true or permanent home on earth, the hatred, rejection, betrayal, and finally the cruel and painful death by crucifixion, then burial in someone else's tomb. In other contexts, the term is used in Christ's exaltation: the resurrection, ascension, the return to earth in glory with angels, His role as Judge. It is certain that every time Jesus uses this title, He refers to Himself.

The Jews had traditionally identified the promised Messiah as the conquering hero who would conquer the Romans and make Israel a powerful nation. Because of this, Jesus did not use that term for Himself. It would have been misinterpreted, and derailed the ministry He had come to perform. He was to be the suffering servant Who came to give His life for many. He came to represent man, to take his place - thus He is uniquely 'the' Son of man. A man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, that leads to glory and a crown.

Verse 21.

A second man comes forward, one who has been one of Christ's followers. He now seems to desire to become a closer disciple, a constant companion. But there seems to be a request for a little time beforehand. His father has recently died, and he asks permission to go home first and take care of the burial. At that time it was customary and necessary for burial to take place very soon after death. It was a duty of the responsible son to see to this service. At first glance, this seemed reasonable.

Verse 22.

But Jesus said to him. "Follow me; and let the dead bury their dead."

At first, this may seem harsh. Several other considerations must be mentioned. Jesus had already begun entering a boat to travel to the other side of the Sea of Galilee. There was no time to wait. So He is saying , if you wish to come, you must come now! The second part suggests that the man would receive no spiritual benefit from being involved in a funeral service. They were commonly noisy because of loud mourning (sometimes by professional mourners). This could only be upsetting and sorrowful.

Also, Jesus is emphasizing that He must be obeyed. Whatever, whenever, and however Jesus asked one of His to do something, there must be no hesitation. Their dedication to Him must be total. Both statements also indicate that earthly family ties must not take precedence over spiritual ones. It is more important to be God's child and Christ's brother or sister. These ties are stronger, more beneficial, and more important, for the spreading of the Gospel.

Lesson XV Continued

These ties are also eternal. Those that are spiritually dead can take care of their own dead.

For this man, the greatest benefit in his entire life would be to be in the presence of Jesus as much as possible. Compared to all other courses of action, this was far greater for that moment and for eternity. We are not told of the man's choice. The lesson Jesus taught was the important thing.

Matthew 8:23-27. The Tempest.

23 ¶ And when he was entered into a ship, his disciples followed him.
24 And, behold, there arose a great tempest in the sea, insomuch that the ship was covered with the waves: but he was asleep.
25 And his disciples came to him, and awoke him, saying, Lord, save us: we perish.
26 And he saith unto them, Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith? Then he arose, and rebuked the winds and the sea; and there was a great calm.
27 But the men marveled, saying, What manner of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him!

Verse 23.

After the two previous interruptions, Jesus finally got into the boat to cross the sea. His disciples followed Him - no hesitation, no questions.

Verse 24.

Once on the journey, there was a sudden and violent storm. The waves were rough, being blown by the gusts of wind. The sea seemed to shake, and the boat was being swamped.

The Sea of Galilee is located in the northern part of the valley of the Jordan. It is about 7½ miles wide, and 13 miles north to south. It is about 680 feet below the level of the Mediterranean Sea. It is surrounded by hills, especially high on the east side. Mt. Hermon is the highest - 9,200 feet. When cool air comes rushing down between the cliffs and collides into the warm moist air above the lake, violent winds result. This in turn churns up the sea furiously, blowing and splashing the water into any boat present.

During the tempest, Jesus was sound asleep. He was at peace. He was obviously physically tired, but sleeping without worry or fear, completely trusting in the care of the Father. The wind, waves, the tossing about of the small fishing boat, the water splashing into the boat, had not awakened Him. Finally the disciples, though experienced seamen, were in desperation. They were afraid that the boat was going to sink and they would not be able to swim to safety in the violent sea. It would seem their last hope was Jesus, yet they, at this time, could not have known what He was going to do.

Verse 25.

They came and woke Him up, saying, "Lord, save us, we are

Lesson XV Continued

perishing."

Verse 26.

He said unto them, "Why are you frightened, O men of little faith?"

How could they think they are in danger of losing their lives, since they were His chosen followers. As His followers, they should have had assurance in their hearts that He would not let any harm come to them. Even awakened in the midst of the violent storm, Jesus is calm and in no hurry to quiet the storm. He felt it necessary to admonish them mildly for their fear in His presence. He was about to give them a demonstration of His divine power and authority that must solidify their faith that He is the Son of God.

"Then he arose, and rebuked the winds and the sea; and there was a great calm." He told the winds and the water to cease their commotion. Usually once the winds die down, it takes the waves a longer period to subside and become calm. Not so here. Both became calm at the same time. It was supernatural.

Verse 27.

The disciples' response: they were amazed. They realized that His power was greater than their previous understanding. They had seen His authority over demons, illnesses, and His charismatic power over crowds. Now they have even seen His authority over natural forces (wind and waves).

As has often been observed, those closest to a famous or extraordinary person are less enthusiastic because they are aware of that person's foibles, weaknesses, and character flaws. This is true of us all, except Jesus. There were no foibles, no weaknesses associated with individual sins, and no flaws. To know Him more and more only leads to amazement.

This also shows that God is indeed in total control even of the weather.

Matthew 8:28-9:1. Possessed Man of Gadara.

28 ¶ And when he was come to the other side into the country of the Ger'gesenes, there met him two possessed with devils, coming out of the tombs, exceeding fierce, so that no man might pass by that way.
29 And, behold, they cried out, saying, What have we to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of God? art thou come hither to torment us before the time?

30 And there was a good way off from them a herd of many swine feeding.

31 So the devils besought him, saying, If thou cast us out, suffer us to go away into the herd of swine.

32 And he said unto them, Go. And when they were come out, they went

Lesson XV Continued

into the herd of swine: and, behold, the whole herd of swine ran violently down a steep place into the sea, and perished in the waters.

33 And they that kept them fled, and went their ways into the city, and told every thing, and what was befallen to the possessed of the devils.

34 And, behold, the whole city came out to meet Jesus: and when they saw him, they besought him that he would depart out of their coasts. 9:1 And he entered into a ship, and passed over, and came into his own city.

Verse 28.

Upon arriving on the opposite side, it was the country of the Gadarenes. It was a region of rocky hills with caves used as tombs. At this particular location, the cliff came down very close to the edge of the water. The district named Khersa was located about 6 miles diagonally across the sea from Capernaum. The hill of rocks with many caves may still be seen. A few miles south-east was the city of Gadara, the capital of the district. This place was mostly settled by Gentiles, as the keeping of pigs testifies.

When Jesus and His disciples stepped ashore, they were met by two men. They came running down from the tombs and were clearly possessed. They were apparently acting fierce and violent.

Mark and Luke mention only one in their accounts. Matthew mentions two. A possible explanation is that one stood out as the leader, and the most memorable one that Jesus dealt with. If this is so, then mentioning the lesser would not have been seen as necessary. Matthew mentions both as a detail of good memory.

In any case, their violent behavior had made it impossible for anyone to pass by the tombs safely. A great number of demons controlled these men and terrorized any who came near.

Verse 29.

Upon recognizing Jesus, they suddenly began screaming loudly: "Why do you bother us, you son of God? Did you come here to torture us before the appointed time?"

They recognize Jesus as God's Judge, and they know they have to face judgment and be condemned to severe punishment for eternity. They fear that they are to be tortured prematurely.

Verses 30,31.

Within sight, on a nearby hillside, a large herd of pigs was grazing. The demons begged Jesus to allow them to enter the herd, knowing He was going to cast them out of the men. Mark mentions the pigs' numbered around 2,000. They must ask permission. Their reasons were not explained, but they were obviously bent on destruction.

Lesson XV Continued

Verse 32.

So when Jesus gave permission, they came out of the men and possessed the pigs, causing them all to run off the cliff into the sea where they all perished. That Jesus knew their plan seems obvious. What else could the demons do with the pigs to harm humans? This would also test the value of the pigs compared to the value of two men. These men had been nearly tortured to their death and had done violence to others, but were now calm and in their right minds, being freed by Jesus.

Verses 33,34.

Those that kept the pigs fled to the city to tell everything - the fate of the pigs and the two men. They were obviously close enough to observe Jesus with the now calm men, and the quickly following dramatic and violent possession of the pigs, driven to their own destruction. They feared they would be held responsible for the loss of the 2,000 pigs in their care. They had to convince everyone that it was not them, but this visitor, Jesus, that had caused this terrible destruction. The release of the two men from the demons was only part of the story. To them, the financial loss was the most important fact.

A great crowd of people came out to meet Jesus - the whole city, indicating a great number. Their motive soon became clear. They feared any additional loss of property, so they begged Him to leave their district. They have no concern about the two men now healed and back to their former selves. They are not impressed that Jesus had authority to cast the demons out of the men.

They don't recognize that Jesus could help them, that He could help their sick and possessed. They did not perceive His love and concern for the two men, which He would also offer to them. They only reacted to what they saw as a threat to their property.

Verse 9:1.

Jesus did as they requested, and returned to the boat. He crossed back over the sea, to where they had left - Capernaum. Mark and Luke both mention that He did leave them a witness. The man who was demon-possessed was told to go home to his family and tell everyone what a great thing God had done for him.

Lesson XVI

Matthew 9:2-8. The Paralyzed Man.

2 And, behold, they brought to him a man sick of the palsy, lying on a bed: and Jesus seeing their faith said unto the sick of the palsy; Son, be of good cheer; thy sins be forgiven thee.

3 And, behold, certain of the scribes said within themselves, This man blasphemeth.

4 And Jesus knowing their thoughts said, Wherefore think ye evil in your hearts?

5 For whether is easier, to say, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Arise, and walk?

6 But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins, (then saith he to the sick of the palsy,) Arise, take up thy bed, and go unto thine house.

7 And he arose, and departed to his house.

8 But when the multitudes saw it, they marveled, and glorified God, which had given such power unto men.

As previously mentioned, Matthew is not following a strict chronological format, but rather by topic. These depictions of Christ's work follow from the apparently simple to the deeper and more formidable. The touch of Jesus cleanses the leper. From a distance His word heals the centurion's servant. He rebukes a fever. But He even has power over the forces of nature. Jesus shows that He has authority to forgive sin - thus reaching into the very heart and soul of men. This goes beyond healing physical illness.

Verse 2.

No time or place is mentioned. It is insignificant compared to what took place. This event is recorded in Mark 2:1-12 and Luke 5:17-26 in greater detail. They describe the crowded house, the four friends unable to get their paralyzed friend to Jesus. The opening of the roof and the letting down of the man on a pallet in front of Jesus. Matthew goes right to the point. And look, they brought Him a paralyzed man lying on a bed (sleeping pad). Jesus perceived the faith they all had in Him. He said to the paralytic, "Take courage, son; your sins are forgiven."

This is an unusual case. The dramatic way the man was placed in front of Jesus. The complete surprise and silence of the audience, and the silence of the friends and the paralyzed man himself. Usually the ill person or their friends or family would ask Jesus for help. Here no words were spoken. To Jesus no word was necessary. He read their hearts. They have come in faith and place themselves completely in Jesus' hands, trusting Him with their friend. The paralyzed man also does the same.

Jesus addresses the man as 'son', a term of endearment. He tells him to take courage or be of good cheer. Then follows the

Lesson XVI Continued

reason: his sins are forgiven. Jesus perceived that the greatest problem in this man's life was his extreme guilt concerning his sins. This was giving him more pain than his physical condition. Jesus thus addresses the most serious problem first. Some have suggested that there was a cause and effect relationship between the sins and the paralysis. Since this is not clearly stated, anything else is pure speculation.

Luke's Gospel gives a description of the audience that had congregated around Jesus in this house. Among the general public were Pharisees and scribes from many villages of Galilee and Judea. Some from as far as Jerusalem.

When Jesus pronounces the paralytic's sins forgiven, they reasoned within themselves that only God has the authority to forgive sin, therefore for Jesus to make that claim was blasphemy. Only God is able to read men's hearts and see their repentance. That a man had such ability and authority was unthinkable. Their next step in reasoning is that it is easy to say to someone that their sins are forgiven, mainly because no one can look at that person and see any change. No one but God can see into their heart, the truth. Therefore Jesus could not prove what He claims to have done. They can obviously judge Him as a fake.

Verses 4-6.

Jesus knew their thoughts and pronounces their thinking as evil - choosing to believe lies rather than the truth. He then speaks directly to their false reasoning. They considered it easy to say, "Your sins are forgiven." That cannot be proven. But if He said, "Get up and walk," either the man would get up, or not. Everyone could see whether Jesus has the power to heal, and thus also prove that He had power and authority to forgive sins. Jesus is questioning their real motives for coming. Had they not come to find fault, to find any way to accuse Him and stop His ministry? In effect, Jesus proceeds to show them (and all gathered there) that He indeed has the authority and Power of God. He tells the man who was still paralyzed at His feet, "Get up, take your bed, and go home."

Verse 7.

And he got up and went home. The man believed and trusted Jesus with his life, so when Jesus spoke, the man obeyed without hesitation. We can only imagine the astonished faces of the crowd, as they watched the man get up, take up his bed, and leave. Now no one could cast any doubt in that crowded house. The reaction of the accusers is not recorded by any Gospel writer. As later events proved, they kept silent about this miracle and became even more hostile toward Jesus.

Lesson XVI Continued

Verse 8.

The reaction of the rest of the audience was appropriate to what they had witnessed. They were awestruck, astonished, astounded. Their response also included the overwhelming desire to glorify God, for only from Him could come such miraculous power for good. Apparently, they at this time accepted the power given to 'a man'. They did not grasp the meaning when Jesus referred to Himself as the Son of Man. They only glimpsed the divinity and glory of Jesus as the unique and only One to ever have this power and authority within Himself as the very Son of God.

Matthew 9:9-13. The Call of Matthew.

9 ¶ And as Jesus passed forth from thence, he saw a man, named Matthew, sitting at the receipt of custom: and he saith unto him, Follow me. And he arose, and followed him.

10 ¶ And it came to pass, as Jesus sat at meat in the house, behold, many publicans and sinners came and sat down with him and his disciples.

11 And when the Pharisees saw it, they said unto his disciples, Why eateth your master with publicans and sinners?

12 But when Jesus heard that, he said unto them, They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick.

13 But go ye and learn what that meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice: for I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.

Verse 9.

Recorded in Mark and Luke also, after the healing of the paralyzed man, is the calling of Matthew. This also took place in Capernaum.

As He was passing on from there, Jesus saw a man named Matthew, sitting at the tax office. Jesus said to him, follow me. Mark mentions that this was on the road near the seashore. The custom house, or booth, was there to collect tariff on goods being carried along the highway between Syria and Egypt. Thus was Matthew occupied when Jesus spoke to him.

His response - he got up and followed Jesus. Matthew records what he did, making no claim for himself or what he was giving up. Without doubt, we may assume that he had heard, or heard about, possibly even witnessed Jesus' ministry in Capernaum. The fact that he already had faith in Jesus and had given his heart to Him is proved by his unquestioning response to Jesus' call.

The use of the name Levi in Mark and Luke suggests that he had two names, as was common at the time (examples abound). However, Jesus may have given him the name Matthew - which means 'gift of Jehovah'. In the lists of the apostles that listed Levi the publican,

Lesson XVI Continued

the name was later replaced with Matthew, the publican.

He would have both language skills and writing proficiency. He appears to have been humble, and rarely spoke. No Gospel records his saying anything. Others are recorded as speaking, Peter most frequently. That he was an acute observer, and record keeper, leave us all in his debt.

In the following event, Matthew modestly does not mention that he is the one who prepared a great banquet for Jesus at his home, and his fellow publicans were invited. Luke records these details.

Verse 10.

Matthew takes it up in the house. It has been suggested that this was a banquet in Jesus' honor as well as a farewell to Matthew's former life. He invites all of his fellow tax collectors, and people of low reputation (according to their economic and social importance, and not being scribes or Pharisees - therefore considered sinners). Also reclining at the table with Jesus were His disciples. Obviously Matthew wanted his fellow workers, friends, and acquaintances to have opportunity to see and hear the One he has decided to give the rest of his life to. This way they might also come to faith in his Savior. These were the people that Jesus came to seek and save.

Verse 11.

Apparently some Pharisees had taken notice of this gathering at the tax-collector's house. Then, when the banquet was over and the disciples were leaving, some of these men questioned the disciples, wanting to know why their teacher was eating with tax-collectors and sinners. To cast aspersion on Jesus, also trying to shame the disciples, this derisive question was put to them. As if to say, if you follow such a Teacher that associates you with irreligious and disreputable people, what does that make you? The Pharisees certainly would have nothing to do with them.

Verse 12.

When Jesus heard this, He said, "It is not those who are healthy that need a doctor, but those who are ill." As the religious leaders, the Pharisees were not responsible to lead, and teach, and help those they considered less than themselves. Jesus described Himself as a physician, reaching out to those in need, especially spiritually. In order to do this, He must be close to them.

Verse 13.

Jesus has a suggestion for His religious critics: "Go and learn what is meant by: I desire mercy and not sacrifice." (From Hosea 6:6.) To bring sacrifices was a hollow formalism, if men were mistreating their fellows and thus disrespecting God and His Law.

Lesson XVI Continued

Love thy neighbor as thyself, shows love and thankfulness to God.

Jesus finishes the thought: "For I did not come to call religious people, but sinners."

The call is to sinners for repentance and to accept Jesus as Lord and Savior. Though the invitation goes out to many, not all will accept it. Matthew 22:14 - "For many are called, but few chosen."

Salvation does not depend on man's will. It is only by the grace of God and the gift of faith that anyone can accept the Gospel and the eternal salvation it brings (see Matthew 7:7; Matthew 19:25,26; Luke 11:13; Luke 12:32; Luke 22:31,32; John 3:3,5; John 6:44; John 12:32; John 15:5). There are additional verses in the Epistles. It is not a work of man, that anyone should boast.

Matthew 9:14-17. About Fasting.

14 ¶ Then came to him the disciples of John, saying, Why do we and the Pharisees fast oft, but thy disciples fast not?

15 And Jesus said unto them, Can the children of the bridechamber mourn, as long as the bridegroom is with them? but the days will come, when the bridegroom shall be taken from them, and then shall they fast.

16 No man putteth a piece of new cloth unto an old garment; for that which is put in to fill it up taketh from the garment, and the rent is made worse.

17 Neither do men put new wine into old bottles: else the bottles break, and the wine runneth out, and the bottles perish: but they put new wine into new bottles, and both are preserved.

Verse 14.

The group that called themselves the disciples of John obviously stayed together after John's imprisonment. John himself had not fostered this as John 3:30 clearly states. He pointed his followers to Jesus, that that was his purpose as the herald to the Messiah. Nevertheless, there were Disciples of John the Baptist groups for centuries. In their favor, these men approach directly and ask a direct question for information. There is no appearance of criticism or accusation, which differed from the way the Pharisees acted toward Jesus.

They merely state that they and the Pharisees fast often, but they have not observed His disciples ever fasting. The fasting they did was after the traditions of men and not according to God's law or will. It had become a ritual, a public show to be thought of as especially pious. From God's point of view, fasting was appropriate when mourning, and even then, it should not involve a public display, but be done without notice.

Lesson XVI Continued

Verse 15.

Jesus explains that there is no mourning at this time for His disciples. He uses the example of a wedding. Jesus is the bridegroom, and His disciples are His attendants. Several times in Scripture, this relation of bride and bridegroom describes that of the chosen people and Jehovah, of the church and Christ. Always it means the closest bond of love.

In calling His disciples His attendants, Jesus was describing their role at this time: they were the groom's friends and were to do everything to arrange for the necessities of the festivities. To be fasting in preparation for a wedding was ridiculous. Jesus was proclaiming the Good News to the people doing miracles of healing and mercy, teaching about God's love and forgiveness. Only joy and celebration can be the response.

Then, Jesus pronounces the prediction of His untimely death. He is to be taken away from them. Then they shall fast. They shall indeed experience deep sorrow, but not of long duration. What Jesus was doing was totally new, never seen before in the world - or ever since. Everything He brought was truth, love, life, spirit, peace, joy, release, health and words of forgiveness and salvation. How can this ever relate to the superficial and prideful traditions of the self-righteous?

"They go together as well as:" Jesus uses examples from daily life to emphasize the difference. Things that anyone with practical experience would know.

Verse 16.

With cloth, especially wool, if a new piece of unshrunk cloth is sewn to an old garment, then the garment is washed, the new piece will shrink and pull to pieces the cloth it was sewn to. This damages the garment more than the original tear or hole.

Verse 17.

A different example with the same message. Wine was stored in wineskins of sheep or goat. Old wineskins become dried out and stiff. If new wine was put in one, as the wine fermented it would put expanding pressure on the skin and end up splitting it. The wine would pour out and be wasted, and the skin would be of no further use. Everyone knows better than that. New wine must have a new wineskin that is flexible and will stretch as the pressure increases. Both are therefore preserved.

Jesus could not and would not be forced into the old stratified man-made traditions of the Pharisees. What He came to earth to do was totally new, and directly from God. It was and continues to be Good News. It must never be encumbered by legalistic, ritualistic, traditions of men (no matter what the denomination). Rules and regulations can lead to people believing that obeying them

Lesson XVI Continued

pleases God, and therefore they are earning their own ticket to heaven. Therein lies the sin of pride. This changes the focus on self rather than Jesus.

Next, Raising of Jairus' Daughter.

Lesson XVII

Matthew 9:18-25. The Ruler's Daughter.

18 ¶ While he spake these things unto them, behold, there came a certain ruler, and worshipped him, saying, My daughter is even now dead: but come and lay thy hand upon her, and she shall live.

19 And Jesus arose, and followed him, and so did his disciples.

20 And, behold, a woman, which was diseased with an issue of blood twelve years, came behind him, and touched the hem of his garment:

21 for she said within herself, If I may but touch his garment, I shall be whole.

22 But Jesus turned him about, and when he saw her, he said, Daughter, be of good comfort; thy faith hath made thee whole. And the woman was made whole from that hour.

23 And when Jesus came into the ruler's house, and saw the minstrels and the people making a noise,

24 he said unto them, Give place: for the maid is not dead, but sleepeth. And they laughed him to scorn.

25 But when the people were put forth, he went in, and took her by the hand, and the maid arose.

Verse 18.

This event takes place while Jesus was still addressing the group about fasting. An elder of the synagogue has come up to Jesus and knelt before him. Mark and Luke mention his name as Jairus. Matthew's account is shorter than Mark and Luke's. It has 9 verses, compared to Mark's 25 and Luke's 17.

Matthew takes up the story after the daughter has died. By kneeling before Jesus, the man showed deep respect and supplication. He appealed to Jesus for help far beyond what anyone else had. Obviously he had arrived at a deep faith in who Jesus was, for he was asking for a miracle Jesus had so far not performed, namely raising someone from the dead. He expresses his faith by saying, "come and lay thy hand upon her, and she shall live." The touch of Jesus has the power of God to life.

Verse 19.

At once, Jesus went with the man, along with the disciples.

Verses 20,21.

An interruption of the journey. Though Jesus was interrupted many times during His ministry, He every time used it as an opportunity for reaching out and blessing - even the one who interrupted. What an example to follow.

So here, the woman came up from behind, obviously so that she would not be noticed, not wishing to stop Jesus as He walked. She is described as in serious distress, having endured 12 years of bleeding, whether constant or periodic. No physician had been able to

Lesson XVII Continued

help her. Mark mentions that she had spent all she had trying to get help. The issue of blood also made her ceremonially unclean, and therefore untouchable, nor was she able to touch another, thereby making them unclean also.

She was going to only touch one of the tassels at the corner of His outer robe (there were four - one at each corner), at the back. Her faith made her bold, and she believed that this simple and single touch would bring her healing. Who would even notice? She had faith in Jesus' healing power, yet did require the touch.

Verse 22.

She was completely wrong about not being noticed, but Christ's reaction was not to question her, but to bless her. "Daughter, be of good comfort; thy faith hath made thee whole." Instantly she recovered her health. He endearingly addresses her as "daughter". He acknowledges her faith and tells her His response to her faith was to cure her affliction instantly. The emphasis was on His response - not the touching of the tassel. This is to prevent any superstitious value in clothing. The accounts in Mark and Luke mention that His public recognition of her healing was for her benefit, that she might again be pronounced clean, and re-introduced into regular society and religious life. Also she now had a powerful story to share, of what Jesus had done for her, and could be a blessing to all she met.

Verses 23,24.

The journey continued to the ruler's house. Upon approach they heard the noisy crowd, which would have included professional mourners. Here also flutes were heard. Of necessity, burial must be done soon after death, and the mourners had come with great commotion, and loud weeping and wailing. The fact that the man was wealthy only brought more people and more noise. Jesus told them to leave. Not only was all this insincere, but also improper, and unnecessary. Jesus tells them the girl is not dead, but asleep. He speaks from His own point of view, knowing what He was about to do. From His perspective, He considered her asleep because He was about to wake her up - back into the realm of the living. In the same way He described Lazarus as having fallen asleep (John 11:11-14). He was going to wake him up from death, as if he had only been sleeping. No one else could think this way because no one else has the power of an endless life.

The reaction of the crowd was incredulous disbelief. They laughed in His face. They considered what He said to be patently impossible, therefore worthy of their ridicule. It also might be noted how quickly these mourners, formerly loudly weeping and wailing, were able to switch to derisive laughter.

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Verse 25.

These extras were expelled. Jesus goes into the room where the dead child is lying. The parents, Peter, James, and John were the only others present. Matthew records the event in few words. Jesus entered in, took her by the hand, and the girl got up.

The ruler had asked Jesus to merely touch her but He takes her by the hand, and very tenderly tells her that it is time to wake up, to get up, as a parent would awaken their child every morning. (Mark 5:41; Luke 8:54.) Mark and Luke also mention that Jesus tells the parents to give her something to eat. Though Jesus also tells them to keep this quiet, they do not. How could they keep their joy to themselves? The most precious thing in their life was lost, then given back to them. A miracle unheard of, yet Jesus performed it, showing the tender mercy and power and authority of God Himself in His Dear Son, even over death.

Verse 26.

The news about this spread throughout that entire region.

Matthew 9:27-38. Healing and Teaching.

27 ¶ And when Jesus departed thence, two blind men followed him, crying, and saying, Thou Son of David, have mercy on us.

28 And when he was come into the house, the blind men came to him: and Jesus saith unto them, Believe ye that I am able to do this? They said unto him, Yea, Lord.

29 Then touched he their eyes, saying, According to your faith be it unto you.

30 And their eyes were opened; and Jesus straitly charged them, saying, See that no man know it.

31 But they, when they were departed, spread abroad his fame in all that country.

32 ¶ As they went out, behold, they brought to him a dumb man possessed with a devil.

33 And when the devil was cast out, the dumb spake: and the multitudes marveled, saying, It was never so seen in Israel.

34 But the Pharisees said, He casteth out devils through the prince of the devils.

35 ¶ And Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people.

36 But when he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd.

37 Then saith he unto his disciples, The harvest truly is plenteous, but the laborers are few;

38 pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth

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laborers into his harvest.

Verse 27.

On the same day, after leaving the ruler's house, two blind men were following Jesus. They were calling out to Him to have mercy upon them, and calling Him Son of David. This title had at this time become synonymous with Messiah - the earthly, nationalistic one to deliver them from the Roman rule. Jesus ignores them, apparently not wanting to acknowledge that title at that time, for what they meant by it.

Verse 28.

It was not until He goes inside a house that He gives them His undivided attention. There has been some speculation about the house. The simplest and most reasonable explanation why Matthew goes into no detail about whose house it was is because that is insignificant. What is important is what Jesus said and did. Whether it was someone's home He has been invited into, or whether it is a house lent to Him, or provided for Jesus' use, makes no difference. The blind men approach Him, and Jesus asks if they believe He is able to do this. They reply, "Yes, Lord."

Verse 29.

He touched their eyes, saying, let it be done for them according to their faith. Faith brought is faith exercised.

Verse 30.

Their eyes were opened. Healing power brought instant sight. As He had previously done, Jesus sternly warned them to keep it quiet. As before stated (8:4), Jesus did not want to be only thought of as an entertainer - showing signs and wonders. He also did not want His power in doing miracles to lead people to push Him toward earthly concerns - to be used against the Roman oppressors as they believed the Messiah was supposed to do. The path to the cross must remain on its divinely planned timetable.

Verse 31.

But when they left, as one would naturally expect, they spread the news. Their excitement and joy made it humanly impossible to hide. The people they could now see would also question them about how this was possible - such a great miracle. Would we not have done the same?

Verse 32.

One group leaves, another takes their place. Now a demon-possessed person was brought to Him. This person was unable to speak. Demon possession always describes the condition of an evil spirit

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having taken over control of a person's body. This spirit can afflict and harm the person, causing them to have convulsions, or to not be able to talk or see. They can also talk through the voice of the possessed person. This is not to be confused with physical illnesses or conditions, or even mental ones. Jesus could always spiritually discern the presence of these spiritual beings, the agents of satan himself.

Verse 33.

When this demon had been cast out, the man was able to speak. The crowd's reaction was utter amazement, and expressed the thought that never has anything like this been seen in Israel. Whether they had also seen the previous healing is not clear but would certainly reinforce this reaction. What Jesus did was totally new in the world. Many atrocities had been seen, but One Who did miracles of mercy, healing, and tenderness had never been seen.

Verse 34.

The envious religious leaders had the opposite reaction, only wanting to discredit and accuse Jesus of the opposite motive (which was actually more in line with their own). They accused Him of being able to cast out demons because He was working for the prince of the demons, satan himself. They did not even deny the fact of demon possession, or that they had witnessed Jesus actually casting out the demons. Their illogical reasoning will be later thrown back at them by Jesus in 12:24.

Everything done and said by Jesus was for man's benefit - for health, forgiveness, salvation. These men were showing only their hatred and jealousy. They were also ignoring the clear and well known prophecies of Isaiah concerning the mighty works of the promised Messiah to do the very things they had observed Jesus doing. Ignorance by choice, and even by denial.

Verses 35-38.

These verses summarize Jesus' traveling ministry throughout the region's cities and villages. He taught in the synagogues and preached the Gospel of the kingdom. He healed every illness. As He observes the groups that come to Him, He was moved with great compassion. He felt their weariness and hopelessness. Fatigued and forlorn, like sheep without a shepherd. The religious leaders who should have led the whole nation in the true ways of God, taught the Law of loving God and fellow man, and lived out that law by example. They had totally failed. They avoided and looked down on the common people. The leaders placed themselves above the people through their man made 'religious' traditions and self-righteous public displays. They tried to burden them with their miniscule regulations and rituals. The perceptive heart of Jesus deeply felt their lost

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condition. As the Good Shepherd, He wished to bring them into His fold. Jesus desires to share these thoughts with His disciples and let them know their role in this ministry.

Verses 37,38.

To His disciples, Jesus describes the harvest as plentiful. He has seen the great multitudes in great need of God's message. But the laborers are few. Still great multitudes need to hear God's message, and still those who labor for God in spirit and in truth are few. What Jesus tells the disciples is also our best advice as to what we must do! "Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth laborers into his harvest."

The use of the term harvest carries the meaning of the necessary time to bring in the crops at their peak of ripeness. It also points to the necessity of no delay, that no part of the crop be lost. The state of the people demanded immediate attention, or else they would die in their sins and be lost forever. The term, the lost house of Israel, comes to mind. The harvest is the Lord's. It is truly His desire that people should come to Him and believe, that He wishes to give them love, mercy, peace, forgiveness, joy, and eternal life with Him. The passages of Scripture that teach this are found throughout both Testaments. To list a few: Romans 10:1,12; 11:32; I Corinthians 9:22; I Timothy 1:15; Revelation 3:20-22.

Lesson XVIII

Matthew 10:1-16. Charge to the 12.

1 And when he had called unto him his twelve disciples, he gave them power against unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all manner of sickness and all manner of disease.
 2 Now the names of the twelve apostles are these; The first, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother; James the son of Zeb'edee, and John his brother;
 3 Philip, and Bartholomew; Thomas, and Matthew the publican; James the son of Al'pheus, and Lebbe'us, whose surname was Thad'deus;
 4 Simon the Canaanite, and Judas Iscar'i-ot, who also betrayed him.
 5 ¶ These twelve Jesus sent forth, and commanded them, saying, Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not:
 6 but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.
 7 And as ye go, preach, saying, The kingdom of heaven is at hand.
 8 Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out devils: freely ye have received, freely give.
 9 Provide neither gold, nor silver, nor brass in your purses;
 10 nor scrip for your journey, neither two coats, neither shoes, nor yet staves: for the workman is worthy of his meat.
 11 And into whatsoever city or town ye shall enter, inquire who in it is worthy; and there abide till ye go thence.
 12 And when ye come into a house, salute it.
 13 And if the house be worthy, let your peace come upon it: but if it be not worthy, let your peace return to you.
 14 And whosoever shall not receive you, nor hear your words, when ye depart out of that house or city, shake off the dust of your feet.
 15 Verily I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomor'rah in the day of judgment, than for that city.
 16 ¶ Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves.

Verse 1.

Introduces the following charge. Jesus calls them together and gives them the divine power to heal and cast out evil spirits.

Verses 2-4.

This is a list of the 12. Then 5-42, the charge. They are first told where to go, what to say, and what to do. Also what provision to begin with, and where they are to stay. What begins in verse 16-42, continues the charge with added prophetic descriptions that will only be fulfilled after Pentecost. They are warned about the dramatic different responses: those that accept and those that will not simply reject it, but also bitterly persecute those that carry the Gospel to the people. For some this would lead to their death, even as their Lord was put to death. Their response must be

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complete trust in God, the strength to persevere, and confidence in God's will for them, whether in life or death. Their reward will be kept for them in heaven.

Matthew begins with the list of the 12. It is naturally assumed that they had earlier been chosen as Apostles. Luke 6:12 records that event as having taken place just before the Sermon on the Mount.

The time is now most likely later during the same summer around 28 A.D. They are to be sent on a missionary journey. The choice of the number 12 suggests a connection with the 12 brethren tribes of the Chosen People.

As truly as Jesus represents the Father and has His power and authority, in like manner the 12 represent the Son and are delegated His power and authority. These become the proofs of their being the true ambassadors of Christ.

The names of the 12 Apostles:

1. Simon, called Peter, and
2. Andrew, his brother.
3. James and
4. John, sons of Zebedee.
5. Philip and
6. Bartholomew (Nathanael).
7. Thomas and
8. Matthew, tax collector.
9. James, son of Alphaeus, and
10. Thaddaeus.
11. Simon, from Canaan, and
12. Judas Iscariot, the betrayer.

These names are listed four times in the Scriptures. Matthew 10:2-4; Mark 3:16-19; Luke 6:14-16; Acts 1:13, 26 - also mentions the replacement of Judas by Matthias. All lists have Peter first and Judas last. The most prominent and best known as well as the first called are the first four. Going down the list, less and less is known. It seems that the apostles further down the list were called upon by Jesus later. However, this is a general observation. No indication in any list is given for the order of the names.

The connection of the names by and into pairs suggests that these were the pairs sent out by Jesus on this missionary tour.

The individuals: what we know.

1. Peter: Original name, Simon (or Simeon); the son of Jonas (or John); a fisherman by trade, first in Bethsaida, later in Capernaum. Jesus changed his name to Cephas (Aramaic), in Greek, Peter (from Petros), meaning "rock". Over the time with Jesus, we see him change from unstable and impetuous to a faithful and bold witness to the

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Gospel, leader of the beginning church. Two epistles bear his name.

2. Andrew, also a fisherman, and Peter's brother, who had brought him to meet Jesus.

3,4. James and John, brothers, sons of Zebedee. They are mentioned many times in all the Gospels. Because of their fiery nature, Jesus called them "sons of thunder" (Mark 3:17). James was the first apostle to be killed; John was the last to die. John authored his Gospel, letters, and Revelation.

5. Philip, also originally from Bethsaida. He brought Nathanael to meet Jesus. When not understanding what Jesus said, he would ask for explanation.

6. Bartholomew (meaning son of Tolmai). His other name, Nathanael, was used by John in his Gospel. Jesus described him as an Israelite in whom is no deceit.

7. Thomas (Didymous: the twin) came to be known for his doubting, yet his doubting ceased when he saw the risen Christ and called Him: "My Lord and my God."

8. Matthew the publican. Details on him were previously recorded (9:9).

9. James, son of Alphaeus. Mark 15:40 calls him James the less, meaning younger, or shorter, or less important than John's brother by the same name. This designation is never explained. It has been suggested that his mother was named Mary, one of Jesus' supporters who followed Him, and stood near the cross (John 19:25).

10. Thaddeus - most likely the Judas not Iscariot (John 14:22). Little more is known.

11. Simon, called by Luke "the Zealot". Cananean - Aramaic term indicated an extremist. A party called the Zealots who plotted and worked toward rebellion against the hated Roman occupation.

12. Judas Iscariot (meaning from Kerioth, a town in southern Judea). He was son of a man named Simon. Most often he is called the betrayer or traitor. Though he was used by the devil in that role, it still must be said that Jesus, in originally, choosing him, knew that he was to play that part as necessary to fulfill prophecy according to the perfect will of the Father. That Judas at every step made his own choices is also clear. To try to evaluate his motives can give us some idea of why he continued to stay with Jesus. That he was

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treasurer and was also a thief is recorded more than once.

His final reason for betrayal seems to have been complete frustration and disappointment in the fact that Jesus was not turning into the powerful and victorious political leader that would overthrow the Roman yoke that the expected Messiah was supposed to do. Jesus was doing the opposite. He was meek, making no inciting statements against the Romans. He was not raising an army or making plans to take over anything. He was going around and healing, and preaching love and forgiveness - even toward one's enemies. Judas was only interested in his own gain and importance right up to the end.

It is a remarkable testimony that these men, quite normal, fallible, completely different in opinion and temperaments, were yet chosen by Jesus. It is also remarkable that by being with Him, they learned and matured and grew strong in their faith and were the foundation of His Church. All credit goes to the majestic presence, loving heart, and spiritual power of Jesus. His prayer for them recorded in John chapter 17 shows His love and care for them to the uttermost.

Verses 5,6.

These 12 were sent out after the following instructions: to the lost sheep of the House of Israel first; don't go to any dwelling place of Gentiles or Samaritans.

The Gospel originated in the death and resurrection in Jerusalem. The Gospel must spread from there. This was God's eternal plan, revealed in Old Testament prophecies, especially Isaiah 49:6; 54:1-3; Amos 9:11,12. This was confirmed in the New Testament in Acts 12:47; 15:16-18; Galatians 4:24.

The restriction was temporary and would later be lifted to spread the Gospel to all nations.

The offer was to the Jews first, and this was Matthew's audience. He emphasizes the privileges they have had - all the Old Testament prophecies concerning the Messiah as well as the teaching of the sacrificial system. They were the first ones to hear and see Christ's working among them and they were the first to be offered entrance into God's kingdom by faith in His Son.

Verses 7,8.

As they go, they are to preach that the kingdom of heaven is at hand. This began with John the Baptist, then Jesus, now His apostles. The message was the new opportunity to accept God as their personal king, to reign in their hearts and lives. Christ and now His apostles were to proclaim this and show God's love and mercy and forgiveness unto reconciliation by the following:

Healing the sick, raising the dead, cleanse the lepers, and casting out the demons. As freely as they (the apostles) have received, they must also give. No favoritism, or turning anyone away,

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no thought of their own advantage - for fame or money.

That this was accomplished successfully is recorded mostly in Mark, Luke, and the Acts (Mark 6:13,31; Luke 9:6-10; Acts 3:1-10; 5:12-16; 9:32-43; 14:8-10).

Verse 10.

What provision they are to make for the journey is detailed. They are told not to carry gold, silver or copper coins in their belts. God will supply their needs. To take money would deny their complete trust in God (and Jesus). That belts were often cloth, folded several times, would make carrying concealed coins quite easy. Even a small bag or knapsack to carry food or extra clothing was not to be taken. An extra outer garment or tunic will also not be necessary. No extra sandals either. They were to basically go "as they were". A new staff or walking stick is not needed either.

The given reason: the worker is entitled to his support. The obligation is on those who receive them and their message of Good News from God. Those visited are to supply their physical needs in gratitude for the spiritual blessing they have received., Scripture teaches this in both Testaments; Deuteronomy 25:4; I Corinthians 9:7,14. Paul records his opinion pointedly in I Thessalonians 2:9. God's people will provide shelter and food for His messengers.

Verse 11.

Whenever they enter a city or village, they are to seek for someone who is deserving whose heart is open and fears God. The first place they are invited in is to be the only place they are to stay. It can be assumed that upon arriving, the apostles would first preach in the open - a street corner, the market square, perhaps in the local synagogue. Among the listeners, it would soon become apparent who was gladly accepting their message.

At that time and place, there was little accommodation for travelers. There was a long and respected tradition of hospitality. Everyone who had to travel would need this kind of help along the way. This has also come down to us as an expected behavior for all Christians (Romans 12:13; I timothy 3:2; 5:10; Hebrews 13:2).

To stay in the first home also suggests that it would be wrong (insulting) to seek better accommodations. The most important thing was the message. When others heard about their presence, they would come to the apostles.

Verses 12,13.

When entering a home, pronounce your greeting of "Peace to you". This was calling upon God's blessing on that home and family. That they accepted the visitors with believing hearts meant that God's peace would be freely given to them.

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On the other hand, if the family did not receive them with open hearts, but with suspicion and hesitation, then let the blessing be withheld: "let your peace return to you."

Verse 15.

If anyone will not receive your words or even listen, don't waste your time. As we would say, wipe your hands of that place. The sign of that time was to shake the dust off your feet. The Jews had adopted the custom, that before re-entering the Holy Land from heathen territory, they would shake the dust off their sandals and clothing to remove the unclean dirt which they felt would also make them and what they touched ceremonially unclean. By His statement, Jesus is saying that if even a Jewish home or city refuses to hear the Gospel, they were to be considered unclean. To dramatically emphasize the eternal consequences of such a place's rejection of the Gospel, Jesus says the punishment of such a place will be worse by far than the punishment reserved for the inhabitants of the wicked cities of Sodom and Gomorrah.

This also clearly lets the Apostles know that they will with certainty meet such opposition and rejection - and sometimes worse.

Verse 16.

This makes the true picture clearer. Jesus said it was like sending out sheep in the midst of wolves. But it must be remembered that it is Jesus Who sends them out. As sheep, they seek to find the lost sheep of the house of Israel. But there will be danger. The others, called wolves, are not in charge. As Christ's commissioned representatives, they will be under His protection. To go on their own in their own strength, they would be helpless.

They will still have responsibility to be: "keen as the serpents and guileless as the doves." The caution of a serpent as a human quality points to careful awareness of one's surroundings, and caution, common sense, and wisdom in decisions about people, place, and time. One must determine what actions will achieve the best results. Avoid danger and threat of confrontation, where only harm can result.

The guileless dove was the symbol of purity, meekness, gentleness. So their actions and words are to be totally of a peaceful and positive character. They are to exhibit kindness, and meekness. We remember that the dove was the form of the Holy Spirit descending upon Jesus at His baptism by John. They must be careful and pure.

This manner was followed by Paul, as his letters reveal, as well as his advice to others: Acts 24:16; I Thessalonians 5:22; 5:14,15.

Next, the thought continues as Jesus describes the "wolves".

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Matthew 10-17-42. The Charge Continued.

17 But beware of men: for they will deliver you up to the councils, and they will scourge you in their synagogues;

18 and ye shall be brought before governors and kings for my sake, for a testimony against them and the Gentiles.

19 But when they deliver you up, take no thought how or what ye shall speak: for it shall be given you in that same hour what ye shall speak.

20 For it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father which speaketh in you.

21 And the brother shall deliver up the brother to death, and the father the child: and the children shall rise up against their parents, and cause them to be put to death.

22 And ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake: but he that endureth to the end shall be saved.

23 But when they persecute you in this city, flee ye into another: for verily I say unto you, Ye shall not have gone over the cities of Israel, till the Son of man be come.

24 ¶ The disciple is not above his master, nor the servant above his lord.

25 It is enough for the disciple that he be as his master, and the servant as his lord. If they have called the master of the house Beel'zebub, how much more shall they call them of his household?

26 ¶ Fear them not therefore: for there is nothing covered, that shall not be revealed; and hid, that shall not be known.

27 What I tell you in darkness, that speak ye in light: and what ye hear in the ear, that preach ye upon the housetops.

28 And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.

29 Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father.

30 But the very hairs of your head are all numbered.

31 Fear ye not therefore, ye are of more value than many sparrows.

32 Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven.

33 But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven.

34 ¶ Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword.

35 For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law.

36 And a man's foes shall be they of his own household.

37 He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.

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38 And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me.

39 He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it.

40 ¶ He that receiveth you receiveth me; and he that receiveth me receiveth him that sent me.

41 He that receiveth a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward; and he that receiveth a righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall receive a righteous man's reward.

42 And whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold water only in the name of a disciple, verily I say unto you, he shall in no wise lose his reward.

Verses 17,18.

Beware of men; "the wolves" will do you harm. The disciples must watch out for those with evil intentions. Watch out for traps, by their trick questions, or accusations to incite your anger; nor do anything to arouse their anger. They will try to catch you in any violation that will allow them to hand you over to local courts (city councils), or in local synagogues. If convicted by a court, the person would be turned over to the synagogue officials to carry out the punishment: flogging for certain crimes. Paul was, before conversion, involved in bringing Christians to receive this punishment. After conversion, he received this same flogging 5 times (II Corinthians 11:24). To this prediction, Jesus adds:

They will be dragged before the highest Gentile authorities: governors or procurators; Pontius Pilate, Felix and Festus; king Herod Agrippa I, Agrippa II, and Herod Antipas. This first happened with Jesus Himself, and after Pentecost, to several of the Apostles as recorded in the book of Acts (Acts 12:1; 25:13,24,26).

By saying, "On My account," Jesus is saying that whoever persecutes His disciples is persecuting Him. This is Christ's question to Saul - "...why do you persecute Me?" Jesus is with those that are His and carries them through whatever they face.

Verses 19,20.

Jesus further describes the reasons why they need not worry or fear what they should say. The Father's Spirit will reveal to them in that hour what to say.

The natural reaction to being arrested and brought before judges, governors, or kings is fear. They have authority to condemn and mete out punishment. Focusing on how to defend oneself, how to speak before them, would make anyone nervous and confused. As Jesus previously taught in the Sermon on the Mount, worry is pointless and useless, therefore to be stopped before it starts. The role of the Spirit, then, in that hour, is to remind them of the words of Jesus. It is the testimony of the Son of God that is to be spoken. This was

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carried out as evidenced by the record of Peter and John in Acts 4:8-12; 9:20, and of Paul in Acts 21:39-22-21.

Verse 21.

Now Jesus turns to the after effects of preaching the Gospel. Not just divisions between groups: those who accept the Gospel, and those who reject it. But also divisions within the closest family relationships. Brother will deliver up his brother to death, the father his child, and children their parents. In effect, killing them by turning them in to be killed.

Verse 22.

This horrible result will be because of hatred, and all this to continue down through the centuries even until Christ's return. The world in general will have this attitude towards Christians because of Jesus. As Jesus reveals Himself through the words and deeds of His followers, so will they be persecuted and rejected, even as He was. This is one side of the story.

The other side is that Jesus will see the believer through unto salvation, and that everlasting. It is stated positively: the saved will endure to the end. Those that endure to the end will be the saved. The end of this life means presence with the Lord.

Verse 23.

Time must not be wasted - so if they do not accept your message in one place, go quickly to the next. The record of Acts shows that this advice was followed (Acts 12:17; 13:46,51; 14:6,20; 16:40; 17:10,14).

The next statement of Christ has caused some controversy. "Ye shall not have gone over the cities of Israel, till the Son of man be come."

The most logical conclusion seems to point to Jesus speaking prophetically in the near term and to a far future. In the near term: the disciples' mission will not be complete when Jesus is killed, and come back to life and come to them as the Resurrected Lord. So also at the time in the far future, of His Second Coming in Glory, the situation will be similar, unbelief even in many places in Israel. On the positive side there will be a remnant among the Jews.

Verses 24,25.

Why would the disciples be persecuted, being less important than Jesus? Jesus explains:

Since a pupil does not outrank his teacher, or a slave his master, they should be satisfied to share the lot of their teacher or master. If the Twelve or all believers are disciples of Jesus, and He was rejected and killed, then those that follow Him will be treated in the same way. The fact that Jesus has been called the tool of the

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devil / Beelzebub (in Matthew 12:24-27 and Mark 3:22-27; Luke 11:15-20) gives evidence that they had also called Jesus Beelzebub. If His enemies were so callous and bold as to call the Son of God by the name of His strongest enemy (the devil), what would they not resort to in dealing with His disciples (the members of His household)?

Jesus now begins to tell them why they have no reason to fear proclaiming the Gospel.

Verses 26,27.

"Fear them not therefore: for there is nothing covered, that shall not be revealed; ..." This includes the secrets in men's hearts whether for good or for evil. The evil will be punished; the righteous will be rewarded.

What Jesus now speaks to them privately, they are to be bold and openly proclaim (as from rooftops) - the call to repentance. However, this would be limited at that time. Yet, it would be expanded after the death, resurrection, ascension, and Pentecost when the fully achieved Gospel would be proclaimed with power.

Verse 28.

"And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul..." The 'psyche' or soul, being the invisible core of a person, where the will, affections, consciousness, and conscience dwell. In the beginning, man was created: his body from the elements of earthly matter, his soul from the breath of God, to become a living soul.

This part intricately related to the body, but also capable of a relationship with God. The word 'spirit' (pneuma) most often is used in the New Testament in relation with that part of man that worships the Lord. Also, many times, the two words - soul and spirit - are used interchangeably. But when talking about winning others to Christ, it is always 'soul' winning. Also, widely and consistently taught in Scripture is the immortality of the soul, whether unto salvation or unto punishment.

One way to look at it is that God, in making man in His image, placed a portion of His spirit within the soul (or invisible part of man's makeup). When Adam turned from God in sin, this part became dormant, and was neither recognized nor used unless a relationship with God was maintained. This spiritual part would influence the soul to thoughts and actions above and beyond what a normal selfish person would ever choose to do. Also, as dormant, it would possibly, lead to a person that continually pursued evil to be open to influence and even possession by an evil spirit, one of Satan's fallen angels, now called demons. In the New Testament, this is many times described.

The saving of the soul in the New Testament is described as being 'born again' by the Holy Spirit, that comes to dwell in each believer, becoming the animating principle behind that person's

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relationship and communication with God, and that principle will continue through eternity.

Christ's warning was against thinking that death of the body was the end of existence. Death was not to be feared, and it was not the end for the believer. Christ continues: any fear would be proper when considering the power of God - only He is able to destroy (inflict everlasting punishment) on both body and soul in hell (Gehenna), the place set aside for the wicked after the Final Judgment. Torment in this sense is everlasting for those who reject the Savior. Therefore, to try to save the body from death for a short period of time is ultimately foolish.

The Apostles are to preach boldly, depending on God for their life, both here and hereafter. Their future is as secure as God Himself, Who has the power both of their bodies and souls to carry out His perfect will of salvation for those who accept His Son. What power would the enemies of the Gospel really have!

Verses 29-31.

To give them additional and overwhelming comfort, Jesus describes their value in the Father's eyes. Think of God's care even of the smallest bird that may be worth two for a penny - not one of them will fall to the ground without it being the will of your Father. Then the astounding statement: "But the very hairs of your head are all numbered." Creatures of so little value as sparrows are intimately known by the Father.

To think about the hairs on your head being numbered - we don't even have the ability to even try to count hairs and keep track of each one. How much higher above our puny minds is God's, that He is aware of, at all times, such tiny details? Even more so, that He is aware of all other details at the same time? God's mind is unsearchable.

If God knows us that intimately, and that we are worth much more than sparrows, He also knows and cares for what can we possibly claim to be afraid of? That Jesus describes God as 'your' Father to the disciples shows His acknowledged relationship of the Apostles as God's chosen children. Many other assurances of God's care, grace, mercy, longsuffering, and tenderness are recorded in many verses in Scripture. Here are a few examples: Psalms 91:14-16; 116:15; Isaiah 49:16; Hosea 11:8; John 14:3; 17:24; Romans 8:28; I John 4:19; Revelation 3:21.

The final reason for their bold proclamation is stated in verses 32,33. Whoever confesses Jesus before men, He will also confess before His Heavenly Father. The confession is one of heartfelt faith in Jesus as the Christ, the Savior. Jesus will in turn claim that person as His own, take his side, and plead his cause. But whoever denies Him before men, He will deny before His Heavenly Father.

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Verses 34,35.

To make it completely clear what the effects of His coming will continue to be, Jesus states as fact: "Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword." The One Who brings peace with God, mercy love, salvation, brings a sword? By stating it this way, it forces one to think, "How is this possible?" Upon reflection, it becomes obvious that the effect of the gospel will force everyone to make a choice - accept Christ and face persecution, or reject Christ and work against those that are Christian. The sword is used as a symbol of division, anger, turning one person against another even within families: children against parents, and in-laws.

Verse 36.

This verse summarizes this prediction: a man's enemies will be members of his household. This fact had occurred many times, as recorded in the Old Testament, starting with Cain killing his brother Abel. The eternal importance of one's choice is dramatically spelled out in the next verse.

Verse 37.

The natural and emotional affection within a family is recognized. But when a person is offered salvation in Christ, the intellect and the will must make a choice. The most important decision one makes in life must be total commitment. Love and loyalty to Jesus must override any natural family affection, never again willing to go along with any other person's desires that would take away from Christ's glory.

Verse 38.

To further lay down the ultimate reality of a follower of Christ, we are to take up our cross, as if we, like Jesus, have been condemned to death by the world for living a Christian life. This means acknowledgment that being faithful to Christ may bring pain persecution, even death, and acceptance and willingness to follow Jesus anyway.

This in no way suggests that any personal affliction should be called "my cross to bear." This reference to the cross was not likely to have registered with the disciples as a prediction of Christ's death - but merely an illustration of the seriousness of one's choice to serve the Lord. One's eternal life is at stake.

Verse 39.

The use of the word "life" in this connection is used in the sense of 'himself'. To give his life, he gives himself. He who tries to save his life shall lose it. Whoever loses his life for Christ's sake, shall save it.

Lesson XVIII Continued

To spend all your time thinking of yourself and building your own kingdom here on earth, you will ultimately lose it all - your earthly life and eternal life. To spend all your effort in following Christ, though you die, you will inherit eternal life with Christ, a reward beyond anything a selfish sinful life can offer. Also included in the thought would be the love, peace, forgiveness, and joy a believer would experience still on earth, in relationship with the Father and Jesus and fellow believers. In addition, the joy in spreading the Gospel, and leading others to faith and salvation. That is finding true and eternal, blessed life, through Christ.

Verse 40.

Further encouragement. Jesus explains that the Apostles are His true ambassadors - whoever receives them is in effect receiving Him, and further, as Christ is the Father's representative, they are also receiving Him. That in accepting them and their message they will be accepting the God of all creation. What greater calling could there be but to represent the love of God in Christ, and thereby also the Creator Himself. This same Creator Who showed us His eternal love by sending His Son to die on the cross, that our sins might be forgiven, and we might become His children, now and forever.

Verse 41.

To focus more on those that receive: The previous verse emphasized who was received. This verse includes a reward. He who receives a prophet because of who he is, or represents (God), is in effect welcoming God, and therefore receive the same reward as if he was a prophet.

Jesus goes on to add that even persons of lesser stature in God's work that are welcomed will receive the same reward as that person: here named a righteous person. The reason remains that he who welcomes recognizes the person as righteous and for that reason receives them. That person, to be called righteous, means a true believer in God. To welcome or receive means to bring into one's home and graciously provide hospitality and encouragement. This open and generous service will be rewarded the same as those whom they serve.

To further emphasize the importance God places on even the smallest kindness, if given to a disciple of Christ, Jesus mentions a cup of cold water. He describes the disciples as these little ones. An endearing term as He looks on them as still being so young and immature in the great work they have been chosen to do. It may also suggest what others see them as: little according to the world's measure. They will not be powerful, wealthy, or popular, but rather insignificant. Yet, if recognized as a disciple of Christ and given water for that reason, they will receive their reward.

It could only be an act of love and kindness to give to someone who they recognized as a disciple, thus not giving them any

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advantage, or expecting any return. God reads the heart, even if the gift is of the smallest value. That person shall not lose his reward. Certainly it is blessed to give and the joy of giving is reward in itself, but God's blessing is eternal.

Lesson XIX

Matthew 11:1-19. John the Baptist's Doubt.

1 And it came to pass, when Jesus had made an end of commanding his twelve disciples, he departed thence to teach and to preach in their cities.
2 ¶ Now when John had heard in the prison the works of Christ, he sent two of his disciples,
3 and said unto him, Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another?
4 Jesus answered and said unto them, Go and show John again those things which ye do hear and see:
5 the blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them. Is. 61.1
6 And blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in me.
7 ¶ And as they departed, Jesus began to say unto the multitudes concerning John, What went ye out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken with the wind?
8 But what went ye out for to see? A man clothed in soft raiment? behold, they that wear soft clothing are in kings' houses.
9 But what went ye out for to see? A prophet? yea, I say unto you, and more than a prophet.
10 For this is he, of whom it is written, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee.
11 Verily I say unto you, Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist: notwithstanding, he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.
12 And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force.
13 For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John.
14 And if ye will receive it, this is Eli'jah, which was for to come.
15 He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.
16 ¶ But whereunto shall I liken this generation? It is like unto children sitting in the markets, and calling unto their fellows,
17 and saying, We have piped unto you, and ye have not danced; we have mourned unto you, and ye have not lamented.
18 For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, He hath a devil.
19 The Son of man came eating and drinking, and they say, Behold a man gluttonous, and a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners. But wisdom is justified of her children.

Intro.

First John's doubt is conveyed to Jesus by some of John's disciples; second Jesus answers relating that Isaiah's prophecy concerning Him, He is fulfilling - this to be brought to John in prison; third Jesus explains to His audience the great role the

Lesson XIX Continued

Baptist had played in preparing for His coming.

Verses 1-3.

Jesus had finished instructing the 12 and then proceeded to teach and preach in the nearby cities. Upon hearing reports of Christ's activities, John in prison, sent word by his followers to question Jesus. They are to ask if He is the Coming One or must they look for someone else.

Matthew leaves us to assume that the 12 do go on their first missionary tour. Mark 6:12,13 and Luke 9:6 briefly mentions it. Matthew continues to center his narrative on Jesus' activities - teaching and preaching in the cities of Galilee, as well as miracles. John the Baptist had been imprisoned earlier by Herod Antipas in the prison part of the fortress named Machaerus. It was about 5 miles east of the Dead Sea and 15 miles south of its tip. By being allowed visitors, John had learned about Jesus' activities.

Apparently he had accepted the generally held tradition, amply portrayed in Scripture that the Messiah was to destroy the oppressors and with great power reestablish the rule and religion of the formerly glorious nation of Israel under David. All this was prophesied about Christ's Second Coming. He had also called Jesus the Lamb of God, sent to take away the sins of the world.

As has often been observed, many prophecies concerning Christ had His two comings stated one after the other, without the gap of time that went between. This has been described as seeing afar into the future two mountain peaks - each one representing Christ's coming, first as Savior, second as Judge and King. But from this view the valley between the two peaks could not be seen. It took the first coming prophecy fulfillments to reveal the valley of the Church Age that comes before the following peak of the Second coming in Glory.

We notice that John had concerns but did not merely question and complain to his followers, but sincerely sought to understand by sending the questions he had directly to Jesus.

Verses 4-6.

Jesus had no rebuke for John or his emissaries. He asked them not to just take some long or complicated explanation back, but to report the things they see and hear. Then He describes the acts of love and forgiveness He has been performing throughout His public ministry as well as the poor having the good news preached to them.

The way Jesus phrased the list of activities would certainly remind John of the prophecies of Isaiah 35:5,6 and 61:1 - "Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; the lame man shall leap like a hart, the tongue of the dumb shall sing for joy...The Spirit of the Lord Jehovah is upon me, anointing me to preach the good news to the meek." It suggests that John would regain his faith in Jesus as he realized and remembered

Lesson XIX Continued

this role of Messiah.

Jesus adds in His recitation the greater miracle of raising of the dead. What greater witness to the unique and God empowered ministry of His Christ could there be? The message to John ends with a blessing on those that are not repelled by Him. Possibly a tender rebuke. The things that Jesus did and said should be great occasions for attraction, rejoicing and increasing faith in Him.

Jesus is going to praise John and his ministry and accuse those who found fault with his message as herald, and also with Jesus to whom he bore witness. We can only assume that the words of Jesus conveyed to John had the desired result.

Verse 7.

When these messengers were leaving, Jesus began talking to the crowds about John.

Using the picture of a reed swaying in the wind - is that what they had gone into the wilderness to see? He is reminding them about the strong, unshakeable character John had been - that's what they had gone to see.

Verse 8.

A second question, a picture of a man in soft clothing - is that what they had gone to see? Soft garments point to a soft person, used to soft living, luxury, and pleasing conversation. John was the opposite, with rough, durable clothing, and strong speech. John would never be found in king's palaces. John was in fact in prison because of his stern speech. The crowds had gone out to see this hero speaking about repentance and turning to God. What popularity he had was now nearly gone.

Verses 9,10.

Jesus proceeds to clearly set forth the true and great mission of the Baptist. He was more than just a prophet. He was the prophesied one that Malachi 3:1 says is the herald, the one who would prepare the way for the Messiah. His role was to turn the hearts of the people to God, to accept Christ's first coming as Immanuel.

Verse 11.

Jesus describes how well John fulfilled his task. John was the prophesied one, born to his role according to the Scripture. Jesus solemnly declares his greatness. He fulfilled his role in three ways: 1.) He called the people to repentance, the only way to enter into the kingdom of God. 2.) He pointed out Jesus as the promised Messiah and told his disciples to go to Him. 3.) This was part of becoming the lesser, to recede and become the least important.

The herald announced the Coming One. When He arrived, the herald was no longer needed. To be great, one must become humble.

Lesson XIX Continued

This John did. From his mother's womb, John had been filled with the Holy Spirit, which certainly gave him the power, guidance, and finally the humility, once his unique role was over.

Jesus then adds: "yet he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he."

This is meant in the sense that John's role being over and now in prison, he was unable to see and hear the great miracles and the wonderful words of Jesus as He ministered to the people. So uniquely blessed were those who were in the presence of Jesus: that even the most unimportant person that entered into God's salvation had witnessed the Son of God fulfilling the prophecies of Isaiah - they were there. It is impossible for us to imagine what that must have been like: to have heard the voice of Jesus speak, to see His hands touch and heal, to experience the infinite love and compassion in His face, just to have been in His presence...But one day!

Verse 12.

Jesus continues describing the history John the Baptist began - until now: the kingdom is pressing forward with strong life force (vigorously). The ministry Jesus described of healing and preaching was forceful and vigorous - as had never before been seen. This had brought many into faith in Christ and thereby entrance into the kingdom of heaven. Those who see and recognize the Truth in Christ eagerly press in and take hold. This shows the result of having to choose - an act of the will that must be strong and decisive and permanent.

The Utmost Proof of God's Plan Brought to Pass

Verses 13,14.

The complete Old Testament (the law and the prophets) began to be fulfilled, beginning with John. There was a 400 year period between the last prophet, Malachi, and John. Jesus goes further to describe John as the great prophet Elijah (he went forth in the spirit and power of Elijah). Also appearing suddenly with stern calling out, and the rustic lifestyle, they were similar. Jesus was calling upon the people to accept that John was a true and unique prophet of the Most High God, like unto Elijah of old.

Verse 15.

Jesus adds the admonition: "He who has ears let him hear." In effect saying, if you have heard what I said, you better carefully think about it and come to the right decision. To hear and not heed would be the biggest mistake a person could make in their life, for it would determine their eternal destination, as well as condemn them to a continued life of sin, fear, anxiety, and turmoil. Jesus used this exhortation (with some variations) on many occasions, and

Lesson XIX Continued

repeatedly in Revelation (2:7,11,17,29; 3:6,13,22; 13:9).

It seems that the Pharisees had turned the attitude of the public both against John and Jesus. These leaders' hostility and hatred was increasing against Jesus as He seemed to be increasing in notoriety and popularity. Their influence did have wide ranging effects - they used openly hostile criticism and various accusations.

Verses 16-19.

Jesus describes how public opinion vacillated. He compares that generation to children in the public gathering places (markets), shouting to their playmates.

We played the flute - you did not dance

We sang funeral songs - you did not play sad

This describes people being childish in the worst sense. They have gathered to play, so some begin to play the flute, a lively tune such as played for dancing at a wedding. The others object, so the flutes are put away. So then the first group begins to sing a slow sad song, such as would be sung at a funeral. This was also rejected. So the first group gets mad at the second at being so contrary and impossible to please. The others return the same back at the first.

Jesus is accusing the Pharisees (and those that followed their opinions) of such inconsistency, and as being as immature as fickle children.

They had begun following John's severe and bold preaching for repentance, now his message was considered harsh and unsociable - and accused him of being possessed. He was rejected for being too sad.

Now they had observed Jesus as the opposite. He was open and friendly, helpful, and loving toward the people. He even was known not to fast, that he drinks and associates with publicans and sinners. He was now rejected as too happy, enjoying too much.

The fact remains that the majority of the Pharisees and their followers stood on the sidelines and observed only on the surface what was spiritually taking place. They criticized what they saw - whether stern and without compromise (John), or open and all-encompassing (Jesus). They refused to see the truth of God and would not participate. That was their choice.

Finally Jesus pronounces the verdict: "But wisdom is justified of her children." Wisdom is always shown to be true.

The preaching of John was to turn the people from their sin to God, the repentance that made way for the good news of salvation. It did produce the desired result in many people who found hope in his message - and especially as he pointed them to Jesus as the promised Savior.

The preaching of Jesus was to all people as being worthy to hear the Gospel of forgiveness of sin and salvation. Jesus not only brought the Good News but He was and is the Good News of reconciliation with God. The fact of the church is the proof that by

Lesson XIX Continued

God's grace, unnumbered individuals through the time since have seen the wisdom in accepting that Gospel. To put it most simply: the wisdom of the gospel is seen in the resulting believers. The truth remains standing, the lies return to dust.

Matthew 11:20-24. Woes Pronounced on Cities.

20 ¶ Then began he to upbraid the cities wherein most of his mighty works were done, because they repented not:

21 Woe unto thee, Chora'zin! woe unto thee, Bethsai'da! for if the mighty works, which were done in you, had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes.

22 But I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the day of judgment, than for you.

23 And thou, Caper'na-um, which art exalted unto heaven, shalt be brought down to hell: for if the mighty works, which have been done in thee, had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day.

24 But I say unto you, That it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment, than for thee.

Introduced by 'then' only indicates an unknown period of time after the preceding verses. Here Jesus is centering His focus on the results of His ministry in the Galilean cities where most of His mighty works had been performed.

'Reproach' here is considered justifiable denunciation. The majority of the inhabitants of these cities have been shown the most bright and Godly light than any cities in all history, the Son of God. These people rejected Him and His offer of healing, of repentance and reconciliation, of eternal salvation. They, and therefore where they lived, remained in continual sin.

Verse 21.

Jesus pronounces woe upon Chorazin and Bethsaida, two towns located near Capernaum, saying that if the mighty works done in them had been done in the Phoenician (therefore Gentile) cities of Tyre, and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. These two cities were to the northwest of Galilee on the Mediterranean Sea. They were known as greedy merchants, dedicated to their own pleasures and pagan worship.

That they would have used sackcloth and ashes indicates mourning. The cloth is coarse and black - made from animal hair. Ashes are a symbol of death added to the seriousness of the sorrow. The day of judgment on Tyre and Sidon will be more tolerable than on these two cities (meaning, their inhabitants).

Lesson XIX Continued

Verses 23,24.

Centering again on Capernaum, thinking itself worthy of heaven, will descend into Hades. This had been impenitent in spite of all the wonderful acts of forgiving love, and the gospel of the kingdom of heaven being offered so openly and freely. To use the word Hades (or Hell) immediately after Heaven makes a harshly dramatic point. This curse though made to the people did not exclude the destruction of the city itself as punishment for their sin. Just so it was with the people of Sodom and Gomorrah.

As a closing to this discourse, Jesus relates a very dramatic statement: if the mighty works done in Capernaum had been done in Sodom, that city would be still standing. That they would have recognized the true and miraculous power of God in the words and acts of Jesus, and sought mercy and forgiveness, makes their fate more tolerable on the day of judgment than those who had seen and heard these things but chose to stay in their sins and in darkness.

The choice is given and is necessary. The result of that choice determines eternal destination. Also the amount of light given and rejected also measures the amount of condemnation and punishment.

Case Closed!

Lesson XX

Matthew 11:25-30. Jesus Revealing the Father.

25 ¶ At that time Jesus answered and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes.
26 Even so, Father; for so it seemed good in thy sight.
27 All things are delivered unto me of my Father: and no man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him.
28 Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.
29 Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls.
30 For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.

Matthew introduces this as: "At that time", centering on what Jesus said. Luke records (10:1,17,21,22) that this was spoken after the return of the 70 disciples who Jesus had sent out in pairs to the surrounding towns He was about to visit. Matthew felt that the Lord's response was most important. His praise of the Father, revealing His will, all leading to the tender invitation.

Luke's account about the disciples' success, in casting out demons, and preaching the Gospel with some measure of acceptance, led to Jesus' response in lifting praises to the Father. With complete trust in the Father we imagine Jesus lifting His eyes to heaven and saying: "I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes."

Jesus addresses His praise to "Father" acknowledging His equality with God. Jesus then calls Him Lord of heaven and earth, acknowledging God's sovereignty in His dealing with the whole universe, and specifically in this instance with men.

Then there is the contrast between hiding and revealing. That God does not reveal His salvation to the wise and educated, reflects the true attitudes of those people who consider themselves wise in the ways of the world. They have everything in control to their satisfaction. They make all their own decisions and can lord it over those who they think are below them. They are proud of their accomplishments, education, prosperity, "being right". They see no need to change nor acknowledge the concept of sin. They have no need of a savior. They work for their salvation like Pharisees.

On the other hand, those described as babes are the ones to whom God reveals the Good News about His love and forgiveness through Jesus. From the spiritual point of view, "babes" would be those who are aware of their dependence on God, that in themselves they are helpless and lost in sin. They are open and longing for forgiveness and acceptance with the Heavenly Father Who can and will take care of

Lesson XX Continued

them through the sacrifice of His Son. They will trust in the Father and live in gratitude for His blessings and give Him the glory.

Of course it is understood that anyone, regardless of intellect or education, wealth or power, can be a babe in spiritual things if they realize their sin, and their helplessness in pleasing God. That only through the perfect life and sacrificial death of God's Son, can they be reconciled with God, become His child, and inherit everlasting life in God's kingdom. With God all things are possible.

Though the Father hates sin, He takes no pleasure in punishment. The Father's good pleasure is found in His mercy, grace, forgiveness, and the gift of salvation through His Son.

Verse 27.

"All things are delivered unto me of my Father..." The Gospel recorded Christ's authority over satan and his demons, over illnesses and deformities, over forces of nature, over life and death, over His disciples, over others to save or to judge. He can discern the hearts of men. He is perfect in knowledge and wisdom, in love, peace, and joy. He is the Truth, the Way, and the Life, the Light of the World. All these He offers to the penitent sinner, though humans can only take in a small part of His qualities.

Jesus says that no one knows the Son but the Father. Only He can take in the whole while we can take in only a small part. But we also become aware that in Christ all the attributes are without limit or measure. This brings us to acknowledge the unsearchable riches in Christ, our boundless source of blessing, of security, and complete trust, both now and forever.

Jesus continues: "neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son..." Only Jesus knows the loving heart of the Father and the unsearchable riches of His mercy and grace and love towards us. Therefore it is alone the Son Who can reveal the Father to man. It is His choice - He is willing. He has come for this purpose - to reveal the Father and His provision for the salvation of men through the Son. For all these things Jesus has praised the Father.

Verses 28-30.

As an acknowledgment and result of all the preceding praise Jesus turns to those around Him and opens His heart to bless them, offering what God has provided by His infinite grace: peace with God, rest for the soul, forgiveness, and reconciliation.

Jesus continues to call out these words: "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."

Coming to Jesus means acceptance of Who He is and what. He offers, what faith and trust receive: forgiveness, peace, love, joy and continuing thankfulness.

The burden and weariness suggests those people have tried to

Lesson XX Continued

please God by their best efforts. Whether trying to fulfill the mountain of regulations the Pharisees promoted, or their own individual beliefs, they have found no peace. They have realized their sin and thereby their utter inability to succeed - which leaves them hopeless. When the gift of salvation through the sacrifice of Jesus is made known to the lost and hopeless, that is the Best News that could ever be heard. By the grace of God, He has provided a way when we were incapable of doing anything by ourselves.

The promise of rest includes many things - rest from hopelessness, fear, anxiety, uncertainty, and frustration in our own efforts. But it also means rest to be forgiven, to feel God's love and acceptance, to have assurance of eternal salvation, to know Christ's love and life through the indwelling Holy Spirit.

Jesus goes on: "Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me..." The Jews considered the yoke the burden voluntarily taken by each person to carry - specifically regarding the commandments. The Pharisees taught that salvation was accomplished by obeying their legalistic traditions which went way beyond the 10 Commandments. Jesus is stressing that after offering rest, the teaching of His Gospel will add no impossible and heavy burden upon those who become His followers. All that is required is simple faith and trust in Him. This is in complete contrast with their former burden - heavy-laden and weary from trying to fulfill the yoke of the Pharisees.

Jesus continues: "for I am meek and lowly in heart..." This humble attitude is the opposite of the proud, those who lorded themselves over the multitudes with their self-righteousness. Jesus is meek: meaning He is at peace with God, at rest in depending on God's love and care. He promises that those who follow Him will also find rest for their souls. They will find the rest He gives.

The former figure of the yoke is reintroduced stressing its kindness and lightness. The original wooden frame placed upon the shoulders had the purpose of distributing the weight to be carried so that the burden would be easier to carry. The yoke must be well-fitting and comfortable, and the burden not too heavy for its best use.

Jesus promises that His yoke is kindness, His burden is light - of salvation, of peace, love, and joy. This is light in the sense of weight and light in the sense of illumination. It is as uplifting as the intense inner emotion of gratitude and the thanksgiving for so great a salvation. Amen.

Matthew 12:1-14. Lord of the Sabbath.

1 At that time Jesus went on the sabbath day through the corn; and his disciples were ahungered, and began to pluck the ears of corn, and to eat.

2 But when the Pharisees saw it, they said unto him, Behold, thy

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disciples do that which is not lawful to do upon the sabbath day.

3 But he said unto them, Have ye not read what David did, when he was ahungered, and they that were with him;

4 how he entered into the house of God, and did eat the showbread, which was not lawful for him to eat, neither for them which were with him, but only for the priests?

5 Or have ye not read in the law, how that on the sabbath days the priests in the temple profane the sabbath, and are blameless?

6 But I say unto you, That in this place is one greater than the temple.

7 But if ye had known what this meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice, ye would not have condemned the guiltless.

8 For the Son of man is Lord even of the sabbath day.

9 ¶ And when he was departed thence, he went into their synagogue:

10 and, behold, there was a man which had his hand withered. And they asked him, saying, Is it lawful to heal on the sabbath days? that they might accuse him.

11 And he said unto them, What man shall there be among you, that shall have one sheep, and if it fall into a pit on the sabbath day, will he not lay hold on it, and lift it out?

12 How much then is a man better than a sheep? Wherefore it is lawful to do well on the sabbath days.

13 Then saith he to the man, Stretch forth thine hand. And he stretched it forth; and it was restored whole, like as the other.

14 Then the Pharisees went out, and held a council against him, how they might destroy him.

By introducing what follows with "at that time", it is suggested that it was connected with the previous teaching, but with no detail of actual time. As usual, Matthew records the important event and teaching of Christ, the incidental chronology being of little importance.

This event was to give Jesus opportunity to illustrate the harmful and burdensome legalism the Pharisees tried to impose on the people's shoulders. In this instance, Sabbath rules. The only detail as to time and place relate to the state of the grain being ripe, therefore near harvest time. Their path, possibly back into Galilee from Jerusalem, went through this field of standing grain. It could have been barley or wheat. Matthew alone mentions that the disciples were hungry. Deuteronomy 23:25 allows a person picking heads of grain, but not the use of a scythe. The disciples began picking and eating the heads of grain.

Verse 2.

Apparently there were some Pharisees also traveling nearby. Whether they were purposely watching Jesus and His disciples to catch them in some fault, we are not told. Yet, they were close enough to

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observe this action and then proceed to accuse Jesus of allowing this Sabbath-breaking. He was allowing work to be done on the Sabbath. According to the rabbinical traditions, which included listings of many categories of work: one was that to pluck heads of grain was reaping, to rub the grains loose in order to eat them was threshing. These disciples were purposely doing these 'works' and to boot they were eating this illegal gain. For Jesus to allow this was outrageous according to their rules. Jesus proceeds to explain how their imposition of minute regulations had covered over God's original intention about the Sabbath.

Verses 3,4.

First He reminds them of the record from the Old Testament concerning David and his men who ate the consecrated bread, for only priests to eat. These were the 12 loaves that represented the 12 tribes, and symbolized the daily fellowship of the people with God. This provision was for the priests, representing His care for them, and their dependence on Him.

Jesus begins with, "Have you not read," meaning that these Pharisees claim to be the educated and approved teachers of the Scriptures, they should be familiar with this particular event in David's life before he became king. The event was one of need. David and his men had been given the bread to maintain life. Here Jesus was being accused of breaking a rabbinical rule that had resulted from a misapplication of God's Law. Here was also a case of a physical need to preserve life. This principle always over-rules, no matter what day it is.

Verses 5,6.

Jesus goes on to be more specific about the Sabbath. The Sabbath law concerning rest did not actually apply to the priests. That was their busiest day. They made all preparations and took part in the people's worship of god. That would be like accusing a preacher of working on Sunday by preaching. Of course the priests would not be considered guilty.

This shows that the Pharisees were in effect placing certain specific traditional rules as not only equal to God's written law, but above it as if their rules had to be enforced without exception. This would not allow for physical necessity or priestly functions.

Now that Jesus has given them two clear and Scriptural examples of their, error, He goes further to explain the spiritual truth concerning Himself. He indicates that what He is, is far above and beyond all that the Temple stood for, for He is the fulfillment. His authority was from God.

Verse 7.

Jesus reveals their blind spot - the ultimate flaw in their

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thoughts and actions. They really didn't care about the needs and suffering of others. They had no pity or kindness, much less a helpful or loving spirit. Their focus was catching others in the wrong, according to their petty rules. They also, especially here, derive some satisfaction in now having something against Jesus. Mercy is God's part, not strict adherence even to sacrifice. This is always true and not to be forbidden on the Sabbath. At this point Mark records: "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath." (Mark 2:27.)

Verse 8.

For the Son of man is Lord of the Sabbath. Jesus wants everyone to know that His disciples are guiltless. They have been allowed what He considered completely proper. He wanted them to provide for their hunger by eating the grain. He was the boss, even of what was to be done on the Sabbath. The Pharisees were not, and had become foolishly encumbered by their legalism. They had so missed the point of mercy, necessity, and even priestly function.

Jesus did continually honor the true intent of that day. He attended and took part in local synagogue worship services. He honored that day in showing mercy and healing. To worship is always right and especially on the day of rest. It should also be a day of rejoicing and reaching out to others with love and encouragement. To see someone in need and not help would be wrong. The following occurrence shows again the Pharisees' complete lack of compassion, and desire to find fault.

Verses 9,10.

The local synagogue - a man with a shriveled hand. Immediately the Pharisees see an opportunity to catch Jesus in another crime. They put Him on the spot by quickly asking Him if it is right (legal) to heal on the Sabbath. Their motive: to bring a charge against Him.

The commonly accepted rule about healing on the Sabbath was that it was legal only if the person's life was in danger. By their cruel attitude the Pharisees were in actuality breaking God's true intent for the Sabbath. Jesus wishes to show them the cruelty of their stance.

Verse 12.

He describes the lesser example of a sheep in trouble. He asks who would not rescue his sheep even on a Sabbath. Then He asks how much more valuable a man is than a sheep. The logic is implacable. The answer is so obvious it need not be stated. Showing mercy is always right, and goes above ceremonial obedience. The conclusion: Therefore it is right to do good on the Sabbath. The Pharisees are silent. To agree with Jesus was to admit they were wrong, and that they had been wrong about Him. To deny this statement would reveal

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their true lack of mercy and their evil intentions as opposing Jesus.

We can only imagine the tension in that place as Jesus stands in their midst with the impaired man standing before Him. It would not do to wait till the next day to heal the man. To prove not only that to do good on the Sabbath is always right, but also that He was representing the very mercy of God, by Whose power and authority He would heal him.

Verse 13.

Then He said to the man, Hold out your hand. He held it out, and it was restored, sound as the other. Jesus did not touch the man or his hand, nor did He tell the hand to be cured. He merely told the man to stretch it out. The man obeyed, the cure was completed. Such a miracle surely engendered faith in the Savior among some of those present. Not so with the Pharisees. Not only was their authority among the people pronounced as of wrong intent, but also their pride was injured. And to compound their guilt when faced with the clear presence of One from God (for no other could do such a miracle), they harden their intentions against Him.

Verse 14.

They went out and took counsel against Him, how they might destroy Him. They could not move against Him in the presence of so many people, especially in the face of such a miracle. They could not try to kill Him, for fear of the Romans. They had to find another way. Mark records that from this point, they join with the Herodians to plot against Jesus (Mark 3:6). This was the political party then in power in that area.

Next, the Chosen Servant.

Lesson XXI

Matthew 12:15-21. The Chosen Servant.

15 ¶ But when Jesus knew it, he withdrew himself from thence: and great multitudes followed him, and he healed them all;
 16 and charged them that they should not make him known:
 17 that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaiah the prophet, saying,
 18 Behold my servant, whom I have chosen; my beloved, in whom my soul is well pleased: I will put my Spirit upon him, and he shall show judgment to the Gentiles.
 19 He shall not strive, nor cry; neither shall any man hear his voice in the streets.
 20 A bruised reed shall he not break, and smoking flax shall he not quench, till he send forth judgment unto victory.
 21 And in his name shall the Gentiles trust.

Verse 15.

From the place of confrontation with the Pharisees Jesus departs. He was well-aware of their increasing hatred and plotting against Him. He also wanted to continue His ministry of healing and preaching and teaching those who would come to Him.

"Many followed Him, and He healed them all." Physical healing did not always mean that person came to faith in Him as Savior.

Verses 16,17.

"and charged them that they should not make him known..." As previously mentioned (8:4; 9:30), Jesus did not seek wide acclaim as just a healer or miracle worker, someone merely to marvel at as a spectacle. This was the opposite reason for His coming. It could also spark a premature serious confrontation with His enemies. To make clear his true mission Matthew quotes Isaiah 42:1-4 which beautifully describes the role of the Promised Messiah as the Suffering Servant. It is not a word for word translation, but very well carries the intended message through.

There are 3 other prophecies on this subject in Isaiah: 49:1-9; 50:4-9; 52:13-53:12.

Verse 18.

The verses describe the chosen servant as God's beloved Son Who has the Holy Spirit upon Him. As servant He has come to fulfill the perfect will of God. He has come to redeem man. He will proclaim the truth which leads to justice according to God's decree. Sinners must be converted by belief in Jesus as Savior. This includes Gentiles.

Verse 19.

These words describe Him as the opposite of those who shout

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for attention, or loud quarreling in the streets, those who disturb the peace over their selfish need to be heard, of winning an argument, or just showing off, being drunk, or trying to cause a riot. Jesus is serious, quiet, and meek, seeking to help others and proclaim in the most gentle way, the love of God, His mercy, and forgiveness.

Verse 20.

These two figures: bruised reed, and smoldering wick, certainly suggest people that are weak, uncertain, confused, near giving up all hope - easily broken or put out. Jesus will not break the reed nor put out the wick. This might also suggest those of other than Jewish background, who had neither the Scriptures nor the teachings about God. They were among the lost that Jesus came to rescue.

This must and will be carried on until justice is victorious in God's redeemed universe.

Verse 21.

In Christ's Name shall the Gentiles (all nations) beside Israel hope. This directly points to the coming public proclamation and spread of the Christian faith throughout the world. The new creation of the Church and the Church Age which would not begin until Pentecost.

Matthew 12:15-21. False Accusation and Its Answer.

22 ¶ Then was brought unto him one possessed with a devil, blind, and dumb: and he healed him, insomuch that the blind and dumb both spake and saw.

23 And all the people were amazed, and said, Is not this the Son of David?

24 But when the Pharisees heard it, they said, This fellow doth not cast out devils, but by Beel'zebub the prince of the devils.

25 And Jesus knew their thoughts, and said unto them, Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation; and every city or house divided against itself shall not stand:

26 and if Satan cast out Satan, he is divided against himself; how shall then his kingdom stand?

27 And if I by Beel'zebub cast out devils, by whom do your children cast them out? therefore they shall be your judges.

28 But if I cast out devils by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God is come unto you.

29 Or else, how can one enter into a strong man's house, and spoil his goods, except he first bind the strong man? and then he will spoil his house.

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30 He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad.

31 Wherefore I say unto you, All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men: but the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men.

32 And whosoever speaketh a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him: but whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the world to come.

33 ¶ Either make the tree good, and his fruit good; or else make the tree corrupt, and his fruit corrupt: for the tree is known by his fruit.

34 O generation of vipers, how can ye, being evil, speak good things? for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh.

35 A good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things: and an evil man out of the evil treasure bringeth forth evil things.

36 But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment.

37 For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned.

Verse 22.

A demon-possessed man was brought to Jesus. He was kept from seeing or speaking. Jesus healed him.

Verse 23.

The emphasis is on the reaction. All the people were amazed. They then focused on Jesus - Who was He? Then the negative question : "Surely this cannot be the Son of David?" Which expects a positive reply - Who else could He be but the Son of David, the promised one. Who else could perform such a powerful work of release and healing? There was hesitation in just coming out and saying that this must be the Messiah. That their general understanding of Messiah's role was to save them from oppression, physical and national, must be mentioned. Even Christ's disciples began with this view. Their hesitation may also be partly because of the presence of the Pharisees, who they knew were against Him. Their reaction to the crowd's question was not long in coming.

Verse 24.

They claim that Jesus (who they call this fellow) must be casting out demons by the power of the princes of demons, Beelzebub (the devil). For the origin of the term see 10:25 note. This charge was pure hatred from envy. They were threatened by the people turning to Jesus as a prophet of God. They wished to maintain their status as

Lesson XXI continued

religious authorities and leaders of the people. That they would stoop so low as to call Him the opposite of Who He was, that He was 'working with' His greatest enemy, only reveals the extent of their desperation and hatred. Without returning their anger, or name-calling, Jesus begins to explain - in easy-to-understand terms - how their accusation is against all logic, reason, and common sense: actually, it's absurd.

That the devil would be destroying his own work by sending off his own workers would mean he is breaking down his control and influence. No city or house or kingdom can stand if factions within them are fighting each other. No person would choose such a course. It is ridiculous to claim that satan would.

Verse 27.

Apparently some of the disciples of the Pharisees also claimed to have exercised this power. This was generally accepted as true. They were quite willing to take a share of the credit. Jesus asks by whom do their sons (followers) cast them out, and to let them judge whether the Pharisees have spoken the truth or not. If their followers agree with their teachers that Jesus works for satan, then they are also condemning themselves (for they cannot prove otherwise). If they disagree with their teachers, then they would vindicate Jesus, and show that their claim was false and evil intentionally. Once again Jesus turns a situation around so that the accusers lose, either way they would answer. They are taught a lesson whether they liked it or not. They set the trap for Jesus, then He turned and put them in it. That they had tried to deny and turn people's attention away from the true nature of what was taking place, Jesus addressed next.

Verse 28.

It is by the Spirit of God that He casts out demons. If the servants of satan are overpowered and cast out, One greater than satan has come, and only God is that One. God's rule then is seen among men gaining victory, slowly but surely, small in its beginning but ever increasing, one day to completely triumph.

Verse 29.

Here another example from daily life. In this case the action of a burglar. The smart burglar would never break into the house of a strong man unless he had a way to neutralize him, keep him out of action, like tying him up. Then he would have complete power over everything in the strong man's house. Jesus is saying that He has already bound satan's power to some extent. Jesus overcame the temptations in the desert. God had given Him power and authority over the demons through His Spirit without measure. Jesus is undoing the

Lesson XXI continued

damage that satan's servants had been doing. Jesus continued until His death on the cross and the resurrection gave Him the victory unto ascension and glory at the right hand of the Father in heaven. Every believer is another citizen taken from satan's influence over men, to become children of God, in His kingdom unto life eternal.

Verse 30.

The situation of all living is to face the choice between these two realities: God's kingdom, or satan's. We are born with a sinful nature from Adam, and therefore born unto satan's kingdom. If and when we accept Christ, we are welcomed into God's kingdom. Therefore Christ's pronouncement: "He who is not with me, is against me." To be with Jesus means a life of gathering - helping others and bringing others into the fold of believers. To be outside of Jesus, one has to look out for themselves.

Verses 31,32.

The unpardonable sin: Jesus speaks to the eternal judgment on what these Pharisees have done. To clarify, He explains that every sin, which includes both the general category of blasphemy and speaking against Jesus, shall be forgiven. The Greek term blasphemy included speaking against God or man: name-calling, slander, defamation, reviling, cursing, wrongful use of holy things, and so on. All these may be forgiven.

There is one exception: blasphemy against the Holy Spirit - this will not ever be forgiven: not now, not in the age to come. This directly points to the fact that the Pharisees have deliberately planned, and carried out, the claim that Jesus is casting out demons by the power of the devil. It is by the power of the Holy Spirit that Jesus casts them out. The Pharisees have no evidence for their claim. Theirs was a willful choice to harden their hearts against Jesus, to try to destroy Him by the worst accusation possible: to attribute to satan the works of God and His Spirit. They have chosen their path and advanced a long way down it. Their fate is sealed. It is no longer possible for them to hear the prompting of the Spirit; they have not listened and will not hear. Their sin is unto death.

The believer may grieve the Spirit (Ephesians 4:30), resist the Spirit (Acts 7:51), and quench the Spirit (I Thessalonians 5:19). These come from our selfish and willful human nature, that we will struggle with in this life. Our goal is to do the opposite: to listen to the urgings of the Spirit to grow and mature and become more like our Savior. It is not possible for a true believer to commit the unpardonable sin. Being indwelt by God's Spirit guarantees that.

Verse 33.

Jesus goes on, by example, to explain how to tell what is in

Lesson XXI continued

a person's mind and heart. Look at the fruit tree. It is known by its fruit.

Jesus says that to look at the fruit He produces, one can only see good - healing, releasing, mercy, love, forgiveness, and peace with God. To suggest that He is bad makes no sense at all. When one looks, on the other hand, at the fruit of the Pharisees, it is only bad: blasphemy, pride, hate, plotting, envy, etc.

Verse 34.

Straight to the heart: "You offspring of vipers." We recall the same term used by the Baptist to describe this same group. How can you speak what is good or true when your hearts are evil?

To sum up, what is boiling up in the heart will overflow into the conversation. What the Pharisees had in their hearts had now come forth in their hateful speech.

Verse 35.

Here the heart is likened to the treasure box a person has to keep their most precious valuables in. The same word was used to describe the chests the wise men brought their gifts in. In this sense everyone has an inner storehouse. The good person stores what good things that he can bring out. The evil one can only bring out what he has stored in his heart, which is also evil.

Verse 36.

It can only result from the individual's choices, and each person will be held accountable. To not choose to believe in God's love and salvation through Jesus, is to reject the possibility of change. They choose to remain in their sins and take the consequences.

To say that every careless word one speaks will be against them on the day of judgment strongly suggests the importance and impact words really have on others. The word "careless" suggests that what is said does no work, therefore is useless, not being able to produce any good result. This goes much further than words that are directly harmful and destructive, such as blasphemy, lies, slander, name-calling, and so forth. This should suggest to the Christian that our conversation should always be for building faith, for encouragement, and lifting up others: words of kindness, tender-hearted concern and love.

Verse 37.

Now Jesus speaks directly to each person individually by using 'you'. "For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned." These words reveal the inner disposition of the heart, whether the true acceptance and belief in

Lesson XXI continued

Christ, or lies and selfishness and sin and evil. For the believer, this will determine the reward. To the sinner, unrepentant, the degree of punishment.

Lesson XXII

Matthew 12:38-45. Calling for a Sign.

38 ¶ Then certain of the scribes and of the Pharisees answered, saying, Master, we would see a sign from thee.

39 But he answered and said unto them, An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given to it, but the sign of the prophet Jonah:

40 for as Jonah was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.

41 The men of Nin'evah shall rise in judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; Jon. 3.5 and, behold, a greater than Jonah is here.

42 The queen of the south shall rise up in the judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: for she came from the uttermost parts of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and, behold, a greater than Solomon is here.

43 ¶ When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man, he walketh through dry places, seeking rest, and findeth none.

44 Then he saith, I will return into my house from whence I came out; and when he is come, he findeth it empty, swept, and garnished.

45 Then goeth he, and taketh with himself seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter in and dwell there: and the last state of that man is worse than the first. Even so shall it be also unto this wicked generation.

Verse 38.

At this point, everything these men had attempted against Jesus had been defeated. The accusations had been shown to be absurd and filled with hateful intent. Here the scribes, the revered scholars and teachers of Law, along with the Pharisees (many of whom were also scribes) come up to Jesus directly, even politely addressing Him as 'Teacher'. They want Him to produce a sign for them. This is pure sham and very insulting. They are showing that all of the miracles of healing and restoration, and even the casting out of demons, is not enough to convince them that Jesus did them by the Spirit of God.

All of His teaching and reaching out to those lost, hopeless, and in need, should have been acknowledged as true signs of God's love and mercy toward people. All this was not to their interest. They wanted a spectacle, something really big, perhaps fire in the sky, or telekinesis,. Whatever they had in mind was not important, if they even had anything specific. To so politely ask in such an innocent way was expecting that Jesus could not really produce any sign that would satisfy them. They sought to embarrass Him and further insult and deride Him. He was not going to fall into their trap.

Lesson XXII Continued

Verses 39,40.

He answers them with exactly what they are and what they must expect. An evil and adulterous generation. Jesus labels them and their followers evil, always choosing their own best interest. He labels them adulterous because they had turned from the true worship of God and gone after their own lusts and insidious rules and regulations.

The sign He will give them will be the sign of His triumph over sin, the flesh, the devil, and death, at His resurrection. It is as prefigured in the record of Jonah - which Jesus obviously accepts as factual. As Jonah was 3 days and 3 nights, as good as dead in the belly of the sea-monster (giant sea creature, most likely a whale), so shall the Son of man be in the heart of the earth for the same amount of time.

It is obviously understood as Jonah was spewed up on the land, a return to life among men, so Jesus was to rise up out of the grave also. That even this sign would lead these people to repent Jesus had no illusions. This generation was deeply hardened in their evil ways. Jesus then describes the reaction of the Ninevites to the preaching of Jonah as repentance, turning to God. In the judgment these men shall condemn this generation. They, not even being Jews, repented at the preaching of an otherwise unknown Jewish prophet.

But this generation is in the presence of the greatest Prophet, the Messiah, that earth will ever see, and yet they refuse to accept Him and turn to God. It also reveals that those believers will be present with God and Jesus at the Final Judgment, and thus in a position to join in the condemnation of those who saw and rejected the Holy One so much greater than Jonah.

Verse 42.

The Queen of Sheba, another example. This time someone of great importance who chose to leave her place of comfort to travel, as if from the ends of the earth, just to sit at the feet of Solomon, and listen to his wisdom from God. In I Kings 10:1, she is reported as saying, "Blessed be Jehovah your God Who was pleased to set you on the throne of Israel...that you may execute justice and righteousness." She also had brought expensive gifts to him. At the judgment she also will arise to condemn this generation.

Contrasted with what she had done, these people endured no hard journey, gave up no comfort or treasure. One greater than Solomon was right there in front of them. They also had the Scriptures that contained the prophecies that spoke of Him. They not only give nothing but plot to take away Christ's life. They had been invited, repeatedly, offered the truth concerning God's salvation. They had seen the miracles that could only come from God and had been in the very presence of the Son of God. Yet they have rejected Him and God.

Lesson XXII Continued

The queen had left her home, based on stories and rumors concerning Solomon. These men had even heard the warning of John the Baptist about what the alternative was to turning to God in repentance: condemnation, judgment, and hellfire. Jesus had also taught the positive and warned of the negative. They still chose the way to destruction by continuing to plot His destruction.

Verses 43-45.

At first, Christ's ministry was greeted by the multitudes with enthusiasm, astonishment, and praising God. Especially considering the compassion and power shown in the healing and casting out of evil spirits. Also the positive teaching and emphasis on love, forgiveness, righteous living. All these things lead to the cleansing of the general population. Here Jesus describes this as an unclean spirit going out of a man (meaning the nation of Israel). Then the unclean spirit returns and finds the man's mind (here described as a cleaned house) empty - not filled with the Spirit of God. Then it goes and brings back 7 more evil spirits so that the ending of that person is worse than it was before the cleansing.

Jesus says that this is what will happen to that wicked generation. This points to the fact that in front of Pilate, the Jewish leaders have no problem inciting the gathered crowd to yell out repeatedly: "Crucify Him, Crucify Him." Their guilt becomes the same as those that incite them.

Thought this is not a lesson on demon activity, several things can be learned. It is a role of demons, designated by satan, to enter and control humans for evil and destructive purposes. The demon is restless when outside - and cannot find peace in deserts. It must be in a place to influence humans.

This is why repentance is not enough. Conversion is necessary that the heart and mind are turned over to God so the "house" is not left empty but clean. The fig tree that produces only leaves comes to mind: a pretension to fruit-bearing, but without any fruit. Such is pride and self-righteousness. The Pharisees dwelled on all the negative legalistic aspects of their religion, while Jesus showed love, compassion, comfort, and forgiveness. His is a salvation resulting with works based on God's grace and mercy.

They were harsh, cold, demanding strict obedience to all their rules. They looked down upon at all those who would not follow their requirements (publicans and sinners). Jesus here is explaining that they and their followers are acting like a man who ends up possessed by 8 demons, all driving them in their hatred and obstinacy to do what satan wants them to - namely, persecute Jesus, and eventually get Him executed. And yet for Him to try to teach them what was happening spiritually was also trying to reach them, that some may see and understand what was happening to them, recognize the truth and come to faith in Him.

Lesson XXII Continued

Matthew 12:46-50. The Mother and Brothers.

46 ¶ While he yet talked to the people, behold, his mother and his brethren stood without, desiring to speak with him.

47 Then one said unto him, Behold, thy mother and thy brethren stand without, desiring to speak with thee.

48 But he answered and said unto him that told him, Who is my mother? and who are my brethren?

49 And he stretched forth his hand toward his disciples, and said, Behold my mother and my brethren!

50 For whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother.

Verse 46.

While He was still speaking to the crowds, His mother and brothers show up. That they were standing outside certainly suggests that Jesus was in a house. That they had come is stated without any reason mentioned. Mark 3:21,22 suggests that there was concern for His getting some rest, away from the crowds. Also, they may have heard about the accusations and negative attitudes by the Pharisees.

Verse 47.

Someone brings the news to Jesus. The house was so packed that they could not get through the crowd. Someone near the door gets the message through. Jesus seems neither surprised nor embarrassed, but as was His custom, He uses the event as an opportunity to teach a spiritual truth.

Verse 48.

He answers with a question: "Who is my mother? and who are my brethren?" This is His primary task: not giving in to human earthly concerns of His human, earthly family. The question speaks to who His spiritual family is, in relation to God. He indicates that believing, faithful, spiritual relationships are most important, for they are eternal. Jesus goes on to show what He means by letting those present disciples know, stretching His hand over them, and calling them His mother and His brothers. Whether male or female, whatever age or occupation, national origin, or former creed, they were now His closest relations. How is He sure of this, and how can they be sure also?

Verse 50.

Whoever shall do the will of my Father in heaven. And the main point of God's will revealed by Jesus is acceptance and belief in Who He is and what He has come to do. "Whoever" sets absolutely no limits. His use of "My" Father clearly shows His divine relationship with God, of love, the bond eternal.

Lesson XXII Continued

Matthew 13:1-13. Kingdom Parables.

1 The same day went Jesus out of the house, and sat by the sea side.
2 And great multitudes were gathered together unto him, so that he went into a ship, and sat; and the whole multitude stood on the shore.

3 And he spake many things unto them in parables, saying, Behold, a sower went forth to sow;

4 and when he sowed, some seeds fell by the wayside, and the fowls came and devoured them up:

5 some fell upon stony places, where they had not much earth: and forthwith they sprung up, because they had no deepness of earth:

6 and when the sun was up, they were scorched; and because they had no root, they withered away.

7 And some fell among thorns; and the thorns sprung up, and choked them:

8 but other fell into good ground, and brought forth fruit, some a hundredfold, some sixtyfold, some thirtyfold.

9 Who hath ears to hear, let him hear.

10 ¶ And the disciples came, and said unto him, Why speakest thou unto them in parables?

11 He answered and said unto them, Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given.

12 For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance: but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath.

13 Therefore speak I to them in parables: because they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand.

Introduction.

They had a two fold purpose - to reveal and conceal. Since Jesus continued to have both believers and unbelievers in His audience, He taught the believers truths that had not been made clear by His public ministry or general teaching. Those who had not accepted Him in effect had rejected all of the proof in miracles and teaching that He was God's prophet and Messiah. So He now used parables to conceal any more truth for them to continue to reject. On the other hand the parables would reveal many kingdom truths that had not yet been taught and were yet to be fulfilled.

Here the present mixed character, and eventual fulfillment - where the true believers receive their reward.

Verse 1.

Jesus leaves the house and goes to the seashore, thereby making it possible for more people to gather to hear Him.

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Verse 2.

Such a large group comes together so that He sat in a boat where He could teach the crowd gathered along the shore. They had come from all around, still fascinated by His reputation and His speaking. By being in a boat, He could face a much larger group than in the more cramped settings. It was the custom for the speaker to sit and the audience to stand.

Verse 3.

Then He told them many things in parables. We may assume that Matthew does not necessarily record all of them here. The first Parable is of the sower. He begins by getting their attention: Lo, or Look, meaning pay attention, I am beginning an interesting story. In this case, a most familiar scene: one everyone would be totally familiar with. A sower went out to sow. This was customary for wheat and barley.

Verse 4.

As the sower walked through the footpath through the field, it was inevitable that some seed fell along the path. Not having been plowed, and having been hardened by many feet, the seeds remained on the surface. This allowed birds to come and easily gobble them up.

Verse 5.

In Israel a considerable part of its tillable soil is found above layers of rock. Many rocks have to be removed to clear an area. Here some seeds fell on rocky ground, where there was little depth of soil, so it quickly sprang up, not having anywhere else to go, no chance of firm roots.

Verse 6.

When the sun came up, they were scorched, having no root, they withered away. Luke adds that having no roots, the seeds had no moisture.

Verse 7.

Those that fell among thorns were soon choked by the faster growing plants.

Verse 8.

Some seeds fell into good soil. They yielded a good crop, varying from a hundredfold, to sixty, and some to thirty. Even the good soil did not produce uniformly. What Jesus had warned before (11:15), He repeats in the next verse.

Verse 9.

He who has ears, let him hear. Those who have a spiritual

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understanding need to think carefully over these words and try to understand their spiritual meaning.

Verse 10.

Obviously the disciples did not yet clearly see why Jesus was speaking to the multitudes with these types of stories. This was not a new or novel way of teaching. Others can be found in Judges 9:7-15, II Samuel 12:1-14; Ezekiel 17:1-10. They wanted to know why now He was often making this form so predominant in His teaching.

Verse 11.

The mysteries of God's kingdom are to be revealed only to the disciples, not to the curious crowds. A mystery here means things that would have remained hidden, had they not been revealed. One of these mysteries was the role of Jesus in history, how He would bring the beginning of the reign of God's kingdom upon earth. Now the specific way that this would be accomplished is described in this parable. These spiritual truths would never have been seen or understood according to normal human observation or thinking. This was and is a matter of pure grace. Man also has a responsibility - what he does with what he is given.

Verse 12.

This is emphasized in this verse. Also standing still is shown to be impossible. One goes in either of two directions. Those who have accepted Christ are on the path to salvation and will continue to be blessed. They will grow and mature, having abundantly grown in love, faith, and grace, peace, and joy in the Lord. For those that choose the other path, what little knowledge or surface understanding of spiritual things, not being practiced or added to is soon forgotten. It will seem to have been taken away, no longer retrievable. Not to use the one given talent is to lose even that. (Matthew 25:24-30.)

Verse 13.

This verse describes the behavior of those who have seen the miracles and heard the teaching, but have not understood their tremendous spiritual significance. They have not perceived their meaning in relation to Who Jesus must be. They only see on a purely physical level, and do not take it to heart and ponder over their meaning. Therefore they are entertained but this leads to no change of mind or heart or life. So, in seeing they do not perceive, in hearing they do not understand.

Once on this path, their hearts will be hardened even as those of the scribes and Pharisees that had continually become more and more hostile. At some point God gives them over to their evil desires and His Spirit no longer strives with them. After that point,

Lesson XXII Continued

their fate is sealed, their path leads only to destruction, and punishment. This had been part of the history of the nation of Israel. When they have rejected the light of God's Word, they are given over to the darkness which they have chosen, and deserve, Their punishment is that they will hear but not understand and then face judgment.

Next, the Fulfillment of Isaiah 6:9,10.

Lesson XXIII

Matthew 13:14-43. Isaiah 6:9,10.

14 And in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah, which saith,
By hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand;
and seeing ye shall see, and shall not perceive:

15 for this people's heart is waxed gross,
and their ears are dull of hearing,
and their eyes they have closed;
lest at any time they should see with their eyes,
and hear with their ears,
and should understand with their heart,
and should be converted, and I should heal them.

16 But blessed are your eyes, for they see: and your ears, for they hear.

17 For verily I say unto you, That many prophets and righteous men have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them; and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them.

18 ¶ Hear ye therefore the parable of the sower.

19 When any one heareth the word of the kingdom, and understandeth it not, then cometh the wicked one, and catcheth away that which was sown in his heart. This is he which received seed by the wayside.

20 But he that received the seed into stony places, the same is he that heareth the word, and anon with joy receiveth it;

21 yet hath he not root in himself, but dureth for a while: for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by he is offended.

22 He also that received seed among the thorns is he that heareth the word; and the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful.

23 But he that received seed into the good ground is he that heareth the word, and understandeth it; which also beareth fruit, and bringeth forth, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.

24 ¶ Another parable put he forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man which sowed good seed in his field:

25 but while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way.

26 But when the blade was sprung up, and brought forth fruit, then appeared the tares also.

27 So the servants of the householder came and said unto him, Sir, didst not thou sow good seed in thy field? from whence then hath it tares?

28 He said unto them, An enemy hath done this. The servants said unto him, Wilt thou then that we go and gather them up?

29 But he said, Nay; lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them.

30 Let both grow together until the harvest: and in the time of

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harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat into my barn.

31 ¶ Another parable put he forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is like to a grain of mustard seed, which a man took, and sowed in his field:

32 which indeed is the least of all seeds: but when it is grown, it is the greatest among herbs, and becometh a tree, so that the birds of the air come and lodge in the branches thereof.

33 ¶ Another parable spake he unto them; The kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven, which a woman took, and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened.

34 ¶ All these things spake Jesus unto the multitude in parables; and without a parable spake he not unto them:

35 that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying,

I will open my mouth in parables;

I will utter things which have been kept secret from the foundation of the world.

36 ¶ Then Jesus sent the multitude away, and went into the house: and his disciples came unto him, saying, Declare unto us the parable of the tares of the field.

37 He answered and said unto them, He that soweth the good seed is the Son of man;

38 the field is the world; the good seed are the children of the kingdom; but the tares are the children of the wicked one;

39 the enemy that sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the world; and the reapers are the angels.

40 As therefore the tares are gathered and burned in the fire; so shall it be in the end of this world.

41 The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity;

42 and shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth.

43 Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Who hath ears to hear, let him hear.

Verses 14,15.

In the case of that generation, this prophecy of Isaiah, the cup of God's wrath "is being fulfilled". The destruction of the nation partly experienced at that time of the exile, is now being filled up by the nation's majority of people that reject their Messiah. The rejection is each individual's choice. John the Baptist and now Jesus, called for repentance and turning to God for forgiveness and healing. God calls upon them to turn again, and He would heal them. The description in the prophecy fits the attitudes

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and actions of the scribes and Pharisees and all those that follow them. They have closed their minds to the spiritual truth of what Jesus has said and done, no matter how miraculously or obviously as from God.

The effects are as described: no matter what they see or hear, they have closed off their perception and understanding. Their hearts have become unfeeling, their eyes are closed, they are hard of hearing. God punishes them by allowing them to have their own way. In rejecting God, God also rejects them. What they have sown, they also shall reap. The use of parables allows them to stay on their chosen path of rejecting God's messenger, Jesus Christ. They look and listen but without any understanding of the spiritual truth.

Verse 6.

The opposite will be true for Christ's disciples: their eyes are blessed by seeing, their ears because they hear. God's favor rests upon them. They hear and see God's truth by faith. These stories give strong visual images, easy to remember, to ponder over. Their day by day time with Jesus gives them ample opportunity to ask Him about the deeper and spiritual meaning. Sometimes Jesus explained before they asked, sometimes after they asked. What value were the lessons they were to learn!

Verse 17.

Jesus solemnly declares a new insight. Many prophets and righteous persons (a long list could easily be made of these from the Old Testament) looked forward to and longed to see the coming of the Promised One, the Redeemer (Hebrews 11:13; 39,40; I Peter 1:10,11). There were some glimpses given in the old dispensation of the coming glory. But none of them was now alive to actually see or hear. Such was the measure of the privilege of those now present with the Lord. They saw and heard what no people before or since were able to do. They were in the presence of the Son of God, the Son of Man.

Verse 18.

Now the explanation of the parable of the Sower (from 13:2-9). Though not recorded here as the Sower, later in the Tares Parable (verse 37), He identifies the sower of the good seed as the Son of man. In Luke 8:11 He identifies the seed as the Word of God, here described as the message of the kingdom, both having the same meaning. By extension, this could describe anyone who spreads the Gospel, the seed being that message. Also, the soil or ground upon which the seed falls represents the hearts of people.

There are four types of soil:

- 1.) The unresponsive (hardened) heart.
- 2.) The impulsive heart (rocky soil).

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- 3.) The preoccupied heart (weed choked soil).
- 4.) The open heart (the well-prepared soil).

Thus, the observation: the reception of the Word of God always depends on the condition of the heart of the receiver. The first soil of the path is hardened - the seed has no place of entrance. The man, intent on his own selfish desires and plans, is preoccupied to the point of ignoring what the Word is saying. Then, the evil one will snatch the words from his memory so that he will not be able to remember or ponder over the true meaning of what he heard. This is just how birds come upon the path and snatch away the seeds.

The scribes and Pharisees had become hardened. They, rather than being open to what they saw and heard from Jesus, only watched and listened with evil intent to try to catch Him in anything, so that they could charge Him with a crime. Certainly there are many other examples of those with hardened hearts.

Verses 20,21.

The description of how the seed fares in rocky ground is compared to the man who readily accepts the Word with joy. Yet, on the surface of his mind, his heart is hard - like rock. This does not allow the Word to take root. When affliction or persecution comes along on account of the Word, the Word is let go and withers away. The rocky soil remains. This is the impulsive response. Emotional and surface response subsides when the emotional stimulus is gone. Then the person is right back as before, sinful and self-absorbed.

We might recognize this as a 'heat of the moment' syndrome. The Word never was accepted in the heart as a life-changing event of self-surrender to the Savior, an inner conviction of eternal truth. So when back in the world he is made fun of or accused of being a 'goody goody' or 'religious fanatic' by his former companions, he quickly gives up and goes back to his former habits and attitudes.

Verse 22.

"Among the thorns" suggests very strong and serious desires as part of this person's heart, a life motivated by ambition, wealth, power, and popularity. The deceitful glamour of riches choke the new message in this person's life. Ambition and worry go together in choking out any chance of the Word of God to be first in this person's life. This is the preoccupied heart. No time is given to ponder over and realize the spiritual truth of God's Word. Any thoughts about spiritual things are soon pushed out by anxiety concerning the worldly future. His desires fill the heart with discontent, anxiety, envy, frustration, and anger. 'If only' he had what others had, he would be set, content, happy. This is the whole focus of mind and heart. There is no room for thinking of others,

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much less helping them. No fruit from the seed of the Word is possible here.

Verse 23.

The good soil, cultivated and open, fertilized and prepared is like the one whose heart is open and prepared to accept the Word of God. The message is accepted and begins to grow. This is the heart that will bear fruit from the Word sown: some one hundred times, some sixty, some thirty. This person is receptive, takes in the Message and ponders over it in his heart, where perception and understanding grow. As the Word is put in practice in his life it bears fruit, the showing forth of salvation, faith, love, joy, peace, compassion.

The description of different amounts of fruit-bearing also strongly suggests that each individual whose life bears fruit will be different. It also suggests that according to the seed of the Word they spread, that a similar number of others will be converted to Christ. The most important point remains that each seed in good soil comes to fruition, thereby drawing others to Christ.

Verse 24.

The Parable of the tares among the wheat. Though similar to the Sower parable, there are major differences. Here the seed is also all good, but the evil one sows tares among the wheat. The former parable emphasizes the reception of the seed in the various types of soil. This parable's emphasis is on the actions of the sower toward the harvest.

The kingdom of heaven is like the situation as described of this man's farm at the present time. The crop being planted and developing, then later at the harvest. The picture is of mixed crops, wheat, and tares - true believers and unbelievers. This will continue throughout the church age. But in the end there will be a separation, both certain and final.

Verse 25.

The enemy is described as sneaky and only evil in intent. He does not want to be seen or noticed. Therefore, he acts at night when everyone sleeps. What he sows is a weed that, when sprouting, looks like wheat. It is called 'bearded darnel'. The resulting robbing of soil and moisture would lessen the wheat's chances of full growth and fruit-bearing. Its similarity would allow it to grow unnoticed until damage was done, and removing it would be difficult. Thus does satan always imitate God's work, but only for destruction.

Verse 27.

The amount of tares must have been way above normal to bring the servants to question the owner. Did he not sow good seed? Then how could all these tares come up? This is so unusual that they

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cannot imagine how this has happened. Where did the tares come from?

Verse 28.

There is no question or doubt in the owner's mind. "An enemy has done this!" The servants' reaction is natural. Should they pull out the tares so no more damage is done to the wheat crop?

Verse 29.

The servants want to help and suggest that they go and pull up the tares before they hurt the wheat any further. However, the owner said no. The danger of also uprooting the wheat while pulling out the tares was too great. Intertwining of the roots would certainly cause damage when the tares were pulled up, and such plants would not mature, and bear fruit. A percentage of the crop would be lost.

Verse 30.

The plan was to let both grow together until the harvest. Then the tares can be gathered out, tied in bundles and burned. Then the wheat can be gathered and saved in the barn. Then there will be no danger to the crop, and if some wheat plants are also damaged, their fruit remains. Those who reap can easily follow this direction.

Verses 31,32. The Mustard Seed.

This symbolizes the outward growth of the kingdom of heaven. The following one about leaven symbolizes the inward growth. The outward visible growth is fueled by the invisible spiritual growth.

The mustard seed was the smallest seed traditionally planted in gardens in Israel. It has been known to grow up to 15 feet tall, allowing birds to come and nest in its branches. This describes the small beginning (Jesus the Word of God) and the continual growth to become a great plant as a tree where birds find rest. This growth of the kingdom of heaven (the Church) continues today and so this parable can also be considered a prophecy.

Verse 33.

From the outward to the inward. Yeast was put into a lump of wheat flour, until the whole thing had risen. An estimate of three measures would be near a bushel. This amount was mentioned several times in the Old Testament (Genesis 18:6; Judges 6:19; I Samuel 1:24). The point is the continual working of the yeast, inside, invisibly, until the whole lump has risen. This suggests the inner growth of the believer, from a babe, newborn. The Christian must grow in knowledge, understanding, prayer, witnessing, and helping others throughout his or her life. Christ becomes Lord of every aspect of his life.

That this speaks of one's inward life is also suggested by

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Jesus warning against the leaven of the Pharisees. Their teaching, if taken in and accepted, would grow and do damage to the whole life of that person.

Verses 34,35.

That Jesus was relating parables to the crowds was a fulfillment of prophecy from Psalms 78:2. This has already been discussed (13:10-17). Matthew adds another prophecy to emphasize that Jesus, as the promised Messiah, is doing exactly what was recorded in the Old Testament - speak mysteries from ancient times in the form of parables.

Verse 36.

An explanation of the tares and the wheat. Once again Jesus dismissed the crowds and went into the house. Now in private, the disciples ask for the explanation of the tares parable.

Verse 37.

The Sower of the good seed is the Son of Man. This term Son of Man from Daniel 7:14 was to be given dominion and glory and royal power. Here He is the humble farmer sowing seed. The good seed is the Word of God, the kingdom of God, the message of Salvation.

Verse 38.

The field is the world. The Gospel must be spread around the world, wherever people are found. Where the good seed takes root, in the hearts of men who accept the Gospel they will grow to bear fruit. The tares are sons of the evil one, their growth only brings destruction and harm. They are sowed by the devil. The harvest will be the end of the age and the reapers are the angels.

Verses 40-42.

The tares will be burned up with fire unquenchable. They are offensive and perpetrate lawlessness, so shall their end be punishment never ending. This is described as a cleansing of the kingdom on the Judgment Day. A permanent separation. The tares to punishment where there shall be weeping and the grinding of teeth, and all the thoughts, feelings, and emotions that go with them.

Verse 43.

The righteous will be shining as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Having received grace on earth, now receive glory there. Jesus adds the familiar warning to these listeners. As they have heard the explanations, they must seriously ponder over their meaning and understand the spiritual truths they portray. It must also be noted that the wheat and the tares describe the situation in the universal church. That a mixture of true believers and

Lesson XXIII Continued

unbelievers is common.

That this is to be expected also means that it is not to be violated. The lesson of pulling out the tares would damage the wheat holds true in the church. Except for extremes within church discipline as described in the New Testament, the unbelievers are to be left alone. We do not have the ability to read men's hearts, and trying to judge everyone would do more harm than good. That decision will be left to Christ and His angels. We are to love one another without judging them, that some by grace may be led to believe.

Lesson XXIV

Matthew 13:44-58. Hidden Treasure.

44 ¶ Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto treasure hid in a field; the which when a man hath found, he hideth, and for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field.
 45 ¶ Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchantman, seeking goodly pearls:
 46 who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it.
 47 ¶ Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a net, that was cast into the sea, and gathered of every kind:
 48 which, when it was full, they drew to shore, and sat down, and gathered the good into vessels, but cast the bad away.
 49 So shall it be at the end of the world: the angels shall come forth, and sever the wicked from among the just,
 50 and shall cast them into the furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth.
 51 ¶ Jesus saith unto them, Have ye understood all these things? They say unto him, Yea, Lord.
 52 Then said he unto them, Therefore every scribe which is instructed unto the kingdom of heaven, is like unto a man that is a householder, which bringeth forth out of his treasure things new and old.
 53 ¶ And it came to pass, that when Jesus had finished these parables, he departed thence.
 54 And when he was come into his own country, he taught them in their synagogue, insomuch that they were astonished, and said, Whence hath this man this wisdom, and these mighty works?
 55 Is not this the carpenter's son? is not his mother called Mary? and his brethren, James, and Joses, and Simon, and Judas?
 56 And his sisters, are they not all with us? Whence then hath this man all these things?
 57 And they were offended in him. But Jesus said unto them, A prophet is not without honor, save in his own country, and in his own house.
 58 And he did not many mighty works there because of their unbelief.

Verse 44. The Parable of the Hidden Treasure.

Here a man was digging in a field which was not his property, so that when he found a treasure buried there, he covers it up. If he was leasing the land he would have a right to be digging, but would not legally have the right to keep the treasure. It was not uncommon during that time (and not unknown in our time) for people to not trust in banks, or even in the safety of keeping things in their houses. People would sometimes bury things so that no one would know where to look.

Such is the case in this story. It is assumed that the owner of the property is unaware of the treasure's presence. If the digger had been a thief, he would have just taken off with the treasure upon

Lesson XXIV Continued

finding it. Overjoyed, he sells all he has and buys the field, and now legally possesses the treasure found therein.

The point is about the value of the Gospel, being worth giving up all one's own selfish and sinful ways to possess this ultimate treasure of salvation and life eternal. Paul expressed it well in his recounting all the things he gave up from a hereditary, social, material, and religious point of view, all to gain Christ.

Paul's confrontation with Jesus was certainly sudden and unexpected. God uses individually suited ways to bring the treasure of His Son before us. Sometimes (or most times) we find it, not looking for it, as the man in the parable did. Those who seek for it and find it, it is still the greatest treasure ever to be found.

Verses 45,46. The Pearl of Great Price.

Here we have a searcher. He was looking for fine pearls. But when he found one great pearl, of great value, he sold all he had to buy it. There is no hesitation, so great is the value that all else is given up for it. So also as before the lesson is the immeasurable value of God's gift of Salvation through Jesus. The difference was the diligent search of this merchant. The price of salvation to us is acceptance and faith. As we turn to God we give our minds and hearts to follow Him, to become more like our Savior, spread the Gospel of love and forgiveness. Jesus said that to save our life we must lose it. Therefore in finding His life (the Pearl of great price we give Him ours (everything we have) and inherit eternal life with Him, to the eternal glory of the Father.

Verses 47-49. The Dragnet.

This resembles the Parable of Tares and Wheat. The fish caught are of every variety. They are not to be separated until the net is dragged ashore. Again comes the task of separation, the task of angels. The outcome for the bad fish is the same as the tares - the fiery furnace, where there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

The audience would have included fishermen who were naturally familiar with this daily activity. The edible and therefore saleable fish were saved in containers. The others were thrown away. So also many who are part of the visible church are not saved (true believers), and at the judgment will not be saved.

To teach the same lesson in two parables, this one most familiar to the disciples, would bring the certainty of judgment to their minds in an unforgettable way: just as they had separated the good from the bad fish. This would impress upon them the importance and urgency of their call to be fishers of men, that their spreading of Christ's Gospel would save men from the certainty of judgment and torment. Those that accepted the Gospel would be brought into life eternal, being saved by God through Christ. The disciples' task and its consequences were clear.

Lesson XXIV Continued

Verse 51.

Jesus asks if they have understood all this. They answered, Yes. This was their opportunity to ask for more explanation if they needed to. They were satisfied in their own minds.

Verse 52.

Now Jesus describes their responsibility as to what to do with this knowledge and understanding. This describes the duties of every Christian from their time until now.

The 'scribe' refers back to one trained in the Old Testament scriptures who then would teach the scriptures to others. The scribe of Jesus is one trained in the Gospel of the kingdom of Heaven, of forgiveness, mercy, grace, and glory. This prepared him to teach, and therefore spread the Gospel to others. He is described as head of a household and has the important duty of providing for that household. He has a storehouse of things to draw from. These included things old, such as the riches of the Old Testament, the promises of God concerning Messiah, and the examples of faith, the Ten Commandments, as a guide for righteous living etc. Also, things new, the Good News of Jesus Himself. This included His salvation, reconciliation with God, the blessings of the Holy Spirit, and the promise of life eternal.

Verses 53,54.

After telling these parables, Jesus left that place and returns to Nazareth (His hometown) and began teaching in their synagogue. The people were astonished. They certainly had heard of His miracles around Galilee and now they question each other in amazement. Where did He get this wisdom, and the power to do these miracles? They would not believe it. They could not imagine that it came from God, not to someone they knew, and had seen grow up. He had not been wealthy, or educated in the Temple in Jerusalem.

Verses 55,56.

Isn't He just the son of a carpenter? Isn't His mother's name Mary? Aren't James, Joseph, Simon, and Judas His brothers? Aren't all His sisters still living here? Where did He get all this?

Apparently Mary's husband, Joseph, had died sometime after fathering 4 sons and at least 2 daughters. Jesus was the son of a carpenter, brought up in that trade for a time of unrecorded duration.

Who did He think is, to act so high and mighty, like one so far above them? Unthinkable, unbelievable, unacceptable. They knew all the rest of His family, and they had no such aspirations, no puffed up putting on of airs. So where did Jesus get off acting like He was better than them?

Lesson XXIV Continued

Verse 57.

The summarized result: they took offense at Him. Because of His ordinary, well-known, and humble origin they rejected Him along with His wisdom and miracles. Jesus recognized this prideful, selfish, and unreasonable attitude, saying to them, "A prophet is not without honor except in his hometown and in his own family." Thankfully we learn later of the faith of His brothers (John 7:5; Acts 1:14).

Jesus does here definitely refer to Himself as a prophet, as He had every right to do.

Verse 58.

Because of their unbelief He did not do many miracles there. They did not bring their sick to Him to be healed. That He did not do many allows the inference that He did do some healing, and also that some came to faith in Him.

Matthew 14:1-12. Herod's Party and the Baptist's Death.

1 At that time Herod the tetrarch heard of the fame of Jesus,
2 and said unto his servants, This is John the Baptist; he is risen from the dead; and therefore mighty works do show forth themselves in him.

3 For Herod had laid hold on John, and bound him, and put him in prison for Hero'di-as' sake, his brother Philip's wife.

4 For John said unto him, It is not lawful for thee to have her.

5 And when he would have put him to death, he feared the multitude, because they counted him as a prophet.

6 But when Herod's birthday was kept, the daughter of Hero'di-as danced before them, and pleased Herod.

7 Whereupon he promised with an oath to give her whatsoever she would ask.

8 And she, being before instructed of her mother, said, Give me here John Baptist's head in a charger.

9 And the king was sorry: nevertheless for the oath's sake, and them which sat with him at meat, he commanded it to be given her.

10 And he sent, and beheaded John in the prison.

11 And his head was brought in a charger, and given to the damsel: and she brought it to her mother.

12 And his disciples came, and took up the body, and buried it, and went and told Jesus.

Verses 1,2.

The opening words refer to some indefinite time after the Baptist's execution and Jesus ministry getting enough attention to be reported to Herod. His response reveals some kind of superstition concerning the Baptist, who he had accepted as a prophet. The miraculous power of Jesus must come from John's risen spirit. It has

Lesson XXIV Continued

been estimated that the Baptist had been killed near the beginning of 29. A.D.

This was Herod Antipas, a son of Herod the Great, tetrarch over Galilee and Perea from 4-39 A.D. His palace was in Perea, far to the south of Capernaum. Thus, news, traveling more slowly in those times, was rather late in reaching him. It is assumed this is the reason for how long it took for news concerning Jesus' ministry to reach him. It was the miracles that most disturbed him. He was a guilt-ridden superstitious murderer, who had been tricked into killing the Baptist. His imagination was so bizarre as to conclude that Jesus was the Baptist restored to life.

Verses 3-12.

These verses record the story of Herod's arrest of John through execution and burial. Matthew saw it as appropriate to record this here.

Verses 3,4.

Herod had John arrested, bound, and put in prison, because John kept telling him that it was wrong for him to now have Herodias (who had been his brother Philip's wife). Herodias has insisted that John be put away to silence him. She had married Herod Philip (half brother of her father, Aristobulus'). They had a daughter named Salome. On a visit to Philip, Antipas became obsessed with Herodias. They left their spouses and married each other.

Then John the Baptist began rebuking Antipas repeatedly for the sins of adultery and incest. Herodias did not want this to continue. It was a slap in her face and made Herod Antipas moody and feel guilty. She wanted the Baptist's death. Herod did have respect for the one man who was not afraid to tell him the truth, even about himself. He considered John a holy man of God.

No doubt Herodias continued to insist on getting rid of this thorn in her side. However, Herod could not bring himself to have the man killed, whether because of his conscience or not. So, John was arrested, put in chains, and kept in a deep dungeon in part of the castle-palace called Machaerus where they lived.

Verse 5.

Another reason Herod hesitated to have John killed was because of the people's believing John was a prophet. Herod was not popular among the Jews. One thing he didn't need was an excuse for them to rise up against him. Imprisonment was one thing, but he feared what they would do if he had John killed. A stalemate. Herodias on one side, the people on the other. Herod in the middle. That was about to change dramatically.

Lesson XXIV Continued

Verses 6-10.

The birthday party, the dancing of Salome, the fascination of Herod, the oath to give her whatever she asked, the request of the Baptist's head on a platter. Because of the oath and the great number of important dinner guests, he could not lose face and back down. He gave the order, and John was beheaded. His head was put on a platter and given to the girl, who then presented it to her mother - the insidiously plotting Herodias.

The lush banquet, with the great men of his domain assembled to honor Herod on his birthday. The perfect opportunity of Herodias to entice her husband into the fateful oath. The daughter was obviously agreeable, so she danced before the assembly. The style of dance was rhythmic, and seductive to the eye and captivated Herod's sensuality. Then the oath of reward, anything she would ask, thinking she would only ask what any young girl would ask, certainly nothing above her station.

Yet, the mother was ready with the request for the Baptist's head, knowing that he could not refuse under this public circumstance. It must be carried out immediately and the proof of death was in the request. There was no opportunity to lie or pretend it was done. Also, what would Herodias do now if he refused? (Talk about a woman scorned.)

Finally, John's disciples were allowed to bury his body. This was a concession on Herod's part. They then went and reported it to Jesus. This seems proper, that John had told them about Jesus being the Promised one, and now that he was gone, they should let Him know, and then follow Him. It was also possibly a warning that Jesus could be in danger. Subsequently, Jesus and His disciples withdrew from the crowds and that place.

Lesson XXV

Matthew 14:13-21. Feeding 5,000.

13 ¶ When Jesus heard of it, he departed thence by ship into a desert place apart: and when the people had heard thereof, they followed him on foot out of the cities.

14 And Jesus went forth, and saw a great multitude, and was moved with compassion toward them, and he healed their sick.

15 And when it was evening, his disciples came to him, saying, This is a desert place, and the time is now past; send the multitude away, that they may go into the villages, and buy themselves victuals.

16 But Jesus said unto them, They need not depart; give ye them to eat.

17 And they say unto him, We have here but five loaves, and two fishes.

18 He said, Bring them hither to me.

19 And he commanded the multitude to sit down on the grass, and took the five loaves, and the two fishes, and looking up to heaven, he blessed, and brake, and gave the loaves to his disciples, and the disciples to the multitude.

20 And they did all eat, and were filled: and they took up of the fragments that remained twelve baskets full.

21 And they that had eaten were about five thousand men, beside women and children.

Between the execution of the Baptist and Jesus' withdrawal to a desolate place, several things took place: John's burial and his disciples' report to Jesus;; Jesus' disciples returning and reporting from their missionary journey; and the news given to Herod Antipas about Jesus' miracles, resulting in his remarking about John being risen from the dead as the only possible explanation for this miraculous power. It has been estimated that these events took place in the latter part of 28 and/or the beginning of 29 A.D., about a year before the crucifixion. The Great Galilean ministry is coming to a close.

Verse 13.

The report from John's disciples about the circumstances leading up to and including his brutal execution, death, and burial, required reflection and mourning. His own disciples just returned from their missionary tour (Luke 9:10:11) would require time alone with Jesus. So we see the deep need to be alone with His disciples. So they traveled by boat near the town of Bethsaida Julias on the northeastern shore of the Sea of Galilee. About a mile south is a rising plain with a hill behind it. It was described also in John 6:3. The multitude heard of what direction they had taken, and walked along the shore toward Bethsaida until they caught up with Him.

Lesson XXV Continued

Verse 14.

When Jesus came out from where He had been on the slope of the hill, He saw this great crowd. Rather than think of His own needs, He had compassion for them and healed their sick. This was the example for His disciples and all believers and the Church: the needs of others must always be placed before one's own. Mark mentions that He also spent time teaching the people (Mark 6:34).

Verse 15.

As evening approached there was concern about the hunger of the crowd. It was getting late and yet the people stayed on. They would have to be told to go, to find food in the nearest villages to buy. But they must go soon, before dark, because this place was remote. It was getting late to be buying food anywhere.

Verse 16.

What a shocking reply. Instead of quite naturally agreeing to what they thought an obvious human concern, Jesus told them they must give them food to eat. Jesus wants them to face their responsibility, and not just dismiss people with needs because they don't want or know how to deal with it. They are not to think only in an earthly or selfish way, but have faith in God's promises, both physical and spiritual.

Verse 17.

The disciples could only find five bread-cakes and two fish (from a young lad: John 6:8,9). Certainly this was almost in despair - this was all that they had. From the earthly point of view - hopeless. This set the stage for what Jesus had all along planned to do: a great miracle.

Verses 18,19.

He tells them to bring Him the food. Then He told the people to sit down on the grass. Mark mentions that they reclined in groups of a hundred and of fifty. This was most likely by families, acquaintances, or those from the same towns or villages. Having the bread-cakes and fish in His hands, Jesus looked to heaven, and blessed the food, giving thanks to God. Then Jesus began breaking off pieces of the bread of edible size, which were given to the disciples to carry to the people in baskets previously collected from the crowd. The same was done with the fish. There is no grand show, no great oration, only the simple multiplication of the bread and the fish. It was done quietly and simply for the feeding of those who had stayed so long with Jesus. He provided for their spiritual needs, now also for their physical needs.

Lesson XXV Continued

Verse 20.

All ate and were filled. Though no description of how this took place is recorded, a likely explanation is that the multiplication happened in Jesus' hands. Any other explanation is impossible - it remains a creative work of God, far beyond our ability to even imagine how.

All were satisfied and the left-overs were gathered - twelve baskets full. Nothing was to go to waste. The food could be used the next day.

Verse 21.

To record the extent of the miracle we are now told that about 5,000 men ate - they were the majority. Not many women, especially with young children, could leave home for such an extended journey (both in time and distance).

The Significance of the Miracle.

Jesus spoke of Himself as the Bread of Life (John 6:35,48). The bread that brings eternal life. In this miracle, the physical bread is supernaturally provided for physical need, but also it represented the supernatural gift of eternal life. Both are gifts of the Savior.

The Old Testament manna from heaven that God gave the Israelites in the wilderness was a sign pointing to the true manna That God was to give to man (John 6:32). A prophet like unto Moses was promised in Deuteronomy 18:18 - "I will raise them up a Prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee, and will put my words in his mouth: and he shall speak them all that I shall command him."

This miracle caused great amazement and then excitement, then emotional fervor. John records in 6:36 that they were like a mob - ready to make Jesus their king, but in the heat of the moment and for the wrong reasons. Of course, Jesus knew this and had to put a stop to it quickly, for His kingdom was not of this world.

Matthew 14:22-33. On the Water.

22 ¶ And straightway Jesus constrained his disciples to get into a ship, and to go before him unto the other side, while he sent the multitudes away.

23 And when he had sent the multitudes away, he went up into a mountain apart to pray: and when the evening was come, he was there alone.

24 But the ship was now in the midst of the sea, tossed with waves: for the wind was contrary.

25 And in the fourth watch of the night Jesus went unto them, walking on the sea.

26 And when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were

Lesson XXV Continued

troubled, saying, It is a spirit; and they cried out for fear.

27 But straightway Jesus spake unto them, saying, Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid.

28 ¶ And Peter answered him and said, Lord, if it be thou, bid me come unto thee on the water.

29 And he said, Come. And when Peter was come down out of the ship, he walked on the water, to go to Jesus.

30 But when he saw the wind boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink, he cried, saying, Lord, save me.

31 And immediately Jesus stretched forth his hand, and caught him, and said unto him, O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?

32 And when they were come into the ship, the wind ceased.

33 Then they that were in the ship came and worshipped him, saying, Of a truth thou art the Son of God.

Jesus' first action is to make the disciples get into the boat and go ahead of Him to the other side of the lake. He would then send the crowds away. He would catch up with them sometime later, presumably by walking along the shore. By sending them away first, some have suggested this was to prevent their possible temptation to get caught up in the fervor of the crowd to a false purpose. Once they are off, He sends the crowd home, it being late and getting near dark.

Verse 23.

This verse reveals possibly the strongest motive for sending everyone away: Jesus wanted to be alone to pray to His Father. He went back up the hill, and when it became dark He was there alone praying. From the prayers that have been recorded, we have a good idea of the range and intensity of them. John 17 is the longest, and includes the following: for Himself in the work He was given to do, for the apostles, and for the Church to come. Now this is Jesus' constant activity - intercessory prayer for His people.

Verse 24.

Back with the disciples in the boat. They were about half way to their destination 2-3 miles of the five, where they would land. It was after dark, the sea was getting rough, the boat battered by waves, with a strong wind blowing from the opposite direction they were going in. This made any progress most difficult. Certainly they were safely in God's hands and in Jesus' prayers but Jesus was going to return to them in a most miraculous way.

Verse 25.

The fourth watch (from 3-6 A.M.) Jesus came to them walking on the water. Even the elements are under His control.

Lesson XXV Continued

Verse 26.

When He came near enough that the disciples saw Him walking on the sea, they were frightened. Talk about totally unexpected, unimaginable, never before heard of, or recorded in human history. Can they believe their own eyes? No, it must be some disembodied spirit or ghost. Naturally they screamed with fear, for this could only be an evil omen.

Verse 27.

Jesus at once spoke to them, "Take courage, it is I, no longer fear." He speaks reassurance that all is well, He is there for them, there is no longer any reason to be afraid. This brings a dramatic reaction from all of them but even more so to Peter.

Verse 28.

Ever impetuous, Peter wants to experience this miracle himself, asking Jesus to bid him to come to Him on the water. He trusts Jesus and wants to be close to Him. The use of the word "if" means "since" in this context. He asks permission, knowing if given would include the power to walk on the water also. This showed complete trust and faith in Jesus.

Verse 29.

Jesus' response, without any surprise or rebuke, is simply, 'Come.' Peter then stepped out of the boat and began walking on the water toward Jesus. It must be remembered that there was a strong wind with accompanying battering waves. Not until they stepped into the boat did the wind stop.

Verse 30.

Peter was distracted by the wind and took his eyes off Jesus. He got scared by the force of the wind, and began to sink. He cried out, Lord save me. Though he became afraid of the wind and waves, in his plight he cried out to Jesus, from trust to doubt, back to trust. This was Peter's pattern of behavior on many occasions.

Verse 31.

Jesus immediately grabbed Peter, saying, "O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?" He was still so much living by his physical senses, and emotional reactions. He was still a babe in spiritual understanding and grasping the truth of Jesus' power, authority, and mission.

Verse 32.

When they were in the boat, the wind ceased. Obviously Jesus stilled the storm. Previously he had stilled a storm that was about to sink a boat He was in. He could have stilled these winds at any

Lesson XXV Continued

time, having power over the forces of nature. Jesus' reason for walking on the water was to be with them, to comfort them, and cause their faith to be strengthened. Indeed, as the event ends, the disciples' reaction seems completely natural. What they have seen was not humanly possible, or imaginable. They reach the only conclusion that could explain this experience - He is the Son of God! They fell at His feet, in astonished awe, and worshipped Him. They had heard the witness of the Father's voice at His baptism, and also the declarations of demons, spirit beings who knew who He was. They had seen the miracles of healing, and heard the words that He had spoken about the kingdom of heaven, and forgiveness.

Matthew 14:34-36. Gennesaret.

34 ¶ And when they were gone over, they came into the land of Gennes'aret.

35 And when the men of that place had knowledge of him, they sent out into all that country round about, and brought unto him all that were diseased;

36 and besought him that they might only touch the hem of his garment: and as many as touched were made perfectly whole.

Verse 34.

They completed their crossing, landing in the area known as Gennesaret. It was a fertile plain south of Capernaum. It had about a 3 mile coastline and was densely populated about 1.5 miles inland. Among their crops were walnuts, palms, figs, olives, and grapes. Before going on to Capernaum, He pauses here to bring blessings to the people of this region.

Verses 35,36.

When some of the men recognized Jesus (having possibly seen Him in their own travels) they quickly sent messengers to the whole area, this being a chance to have their sick ones healed by the Master. They only asked that they may touch the tassel of His garment, and when allowed to do so, all were cured. The people of surrounding villages and towns brought their sick. That they were healed did not depend on their faith or touching a tassel, but always and only on the love and compassion and giving of the Savior. And so only by grace does God give, not because of any merit or worthiness of man.

Lesson XXVI

Matthew 15:1-20. Defilement.

1 Then came to Jesus scribes and Pharisees, which were of Jerusalem, saying,
2 Why do thy disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? for they wash not their hands when they eat bread.
3 But he answered and said unto them, Why do ye also transgress the commandment of God by your tradition?
4 For God commanded, saying, Honor thy father and mother: and, He that curseth father or mother, let him die the death.
5 But ye say, Whosoever shall say to his father or his mother, It is a gift, by whatsoever thou mightest be profited by me;
6 and honor not his father or his mother, he shall be free. Thus have ye made the commandment of God of none effect by your tradition.
7 Ye hypocrites, well did Isaiah prophesy of you, saying,
8 This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoreth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me.
9 But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.
10 ¶ And he called the multitude, and said unto them, Hear, and understand:
11 Not that which goeth into the mouth defileth a man; but that which cometh out of the mouth, this defileth a man.
12 Then came his disciples, and said unto him, Knowest thou that the Pharisees were offended, after they heard this saying?
13 But he answered and said, Every plant, which my heavenly Father hath not planted, shall be rooted up.
14 Let them alone: they be blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch.
15 Then answered Peter and said unto him, Declare unto us this parable.
16 And Jesus said, Are ye also yet without understanding?
17 Do not ye yet understand, that whatsoever entereth in at the mouth goeth into the belly, and is cast out into the draught?
18 But those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart; and they defile the man.
19 For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies:
20 these are the things which defile a man: but to eat with unwashen hands defileth not a man.

Verses 1,2.

On one of these days (Then) a group of scribes and Pharisees came from Jerusalem to question Jesus. Their question was to catch Jesus in some wrong. Their motive was to discredit Him before the people. They were the experts in the Law for the nation. They made

Lesson XXVI Continued

the trip from Jerusalem representing the establishment of their religion. That this upstart had been teaching and acting contrary to their pronouncements could not be tolerated. It had been observed and reported that Jesus' disciples did not practice the tradition of the elders, the regulations by rabbis from the past concerning ritual rinsing of the hands before meals. The claimed intent was the explanation of what God's Law meant as applied to everyday life.

The effect: in many cases these judgments went far beyond what was demanded in the Law and obfuscated the original intent of that law. All the ritual cleansings related most specifically to the priests in their Temple duties. In relation to the people generally they were also required in specific conditions when they make a blood offering to the Lord. The rabbis had prescribed hand rinsing for all the people and with every meal. This was a stretch, an imposition far beyond the intent of the Law.

A brief history as to how this had come about. When the nation had been conquered, the Temple destroyed, and the people deported to Babylon, it brought those that feared God to a stark realization. They and the nation had turned away from Jehovah and this was their punishment. Their only hope of reconciliation and another chance to regain their land rested solely in their turning with contrite hearts back to their God (Jeremiah 29:13). The path was to obey His commandments.

After being back in the land for some time as conditions were different, new application of the law seemed needed. Over time there became a school of experts in the Law, scribes of the Pharisees who spent time making interpretations and stipulations and regulations, based upon some law or other. It became an end in itself, a competition to show their own brilliance. Some became famous, their names passed down and highly honored. What they had pronounced was also passed down, and taught to succeeding generations in the Temple and the synagogues. This was taught by repetition until the student could memorize and repeat all the information. Not until 200 A.D. was this body of tradition of the elders written down by a Rabbi in what is called The Mishna, from the verb meaning 'repeat'. Others had previously attempted to do this but not so completely.

The point here is that there was no concern over whether the hands were dirty or not. The concern was ceremonial purity. This consisted of a pouring of water over the hands, as ritual. These men were concerned with outward piety and obeying legalistic traditions of men, not the heartfelt devotion to God as recorded in His Holy Law.

Verse 3.

They have criticized Jesus' disciples for not following men's traditions. He now criticizes them, for they (not just their disciples) transgress what is infinitely above traditions, God's Holy

Lesson XXVI Continued

Law. And it ends up that they are seeking their own selfish advantage.

Verse 4.

Jesus will now supply them with a glaring example. God said, Honor your father and mother. The word 'honor' means to regard highly, show respect and consideration. This is lifelong and to be shown equally to both. The other side - to curse parents is worthy of death. (Exodus 21:17; Leviticus 20:9.) This is God's Law.

Verses 5,6.

Now, what was the Pharisees' take on this? The problem seems to have come up regarding when parents became old and needed their children's help to live. The Pharisees had made a way around this particular way of 'honoring' their parents. If the parents asked their child for something they needed, all the child had to do was say it is a gift or offering to God (doron - gift; corban - offering). It was to say "consecrated to God". According to the Pharisaic tradition, the child was released from their obligation to help their parents in their need. And their saying this did not obligate them to give the gift then or at any other time. They could just keep it. Thus the Word of God was made null and void for the sake of their tradition. A quote from the Talmud reads: "To be against the words of the scribes is more punishable than to be against the words of the Bible." Talk about conceit and self-importance.

It may also be observed today that even among many Christian churches, the opinions and conjectures of men are placed above the clear teaching of Scripture and the Commandments and clear teaching of Jesus, Himself. That these men would make this part of their teaching while puffing themselves up as scholars of God's Holy Law, and therefore the highest of Piety and Righteousness, was the clearest example of hypocrisy.

Verses 7,9.

Jesus closes the case: "You hypocrites!" Then He quotes a prophet - who they were supposed to be experts about, they should have known and understood. What Isaiah said was about their ways of life, the reality within their hearts. Isaiah was talking about the generation of his day that these characteristics were true about other generations throughout Israel's history, and once again during the time of Christ. Jesus described some of the ways these religious leaders praised God with their lips, doing things in public for a show of piety. In fact they were seeking praise of men. They taught the precepts of men rather than God's truth. They brought no benefit to themselves or others by what they passed off as worshipping the Lord.

Lesson XXVI Continued

Verse 10.

Apparently, the Pharisees and scribes were dismissed, being strongly rebuked by Jesus. He then calls the nearby crowd to come to Him. He has something to say to them, an important lesson to teach them, a spiritual truth to impart. He begins by telling them to listen carefully so they may understand the message.

Verse 11.

The how and what a person eats does not defile that person. It is what one speaks (that comes out of the mouth) that defiles that person. The scribes and Pharisees had tried to enforce the tradition that unrinsed hands were defiled (ceremonially unclean), therefore whatever food they touch would be defiled. If they also ate it, they would be totally unclean. They considered this a binding religious law, that if disregarded made that person unclean, a sinner, an outcast from their religion. In effect, saying any such person that rejects their teaching is rejecting God.

Jesus teaches the spiritual truth, from God's point of view. What defiles a man is what comes from the heart, the mouth being the means of outward expression. The evil intents of the heart are what defile a person.

Verse 12.

The disciples then approach Jesus to inform Him that the Pharisees were offended by His stern rebuke. Had some of the disciples heard them talking among themselves? Had they been surprised at such a reaction? Certainly Jesus was not. They expressed concern - for were these men not the nation's religious teachers and holy men?

The anger of these leaders was justified because Jesus had completely undermined their authority over the people (especially those present at that place and time). Jesus showed that they could not be trusted as the teachers of God's Law, or as examples of holy living. For the preservation of their pride, authority, and rank in society, Jesus must be stopped. The disciples' intentions were good - though beside the point. Jesus knew all this before He spoke in the first place.

Verses 13,14.

Jesus, in answering their concern, explained exactly the value of these men in God's order of things. They are growth that His Heavenly Father has not planted. They were following their own evil nature, not capable of bearing any fruit. They will be uprooted. Jesus tells the disciples to let them go, no longer be concerned with them. They are blind leaders. They can only lead the blind (who cannot tell their leaders are also blind). What happens: they shall both fall into the ditch (or pit).

Lesson XXVI Continued

The plant that bears fruit through Christ (the True Vine) is the person firmly rooted in and blessed by God. The other growth described here is like the tares, which the evil one planted, to finally be uprooted and thrown into the fire. The blindness of the men is self-inflicted - by choice, their hearts have become hardened, so they can no longer see or even recognize the light shining before them in Jesus Christ. They think they are the only seeing ones, above everybody else. Anyone who follows them has also closed their eyes to truth and chosen the path to the pit (hell?).

Verse 15.

Peter (as the usual spokesperson) now asks for an explanation of the 'parable' or pithy saying about the 'mouth' Jesus has spoken to the Pharisees. Especially the part about what comes out of the mouth.

Verse 16.

Jesus implies that He doesn't expect the Pharisees or the common people to grasp the spiritual truth of what He says. But as if questioning: "Are you also even yet without understanding." They have been with Him closely for quite some time, haven't they yet grasped the spiritual lessons He has been teaching them?

Verses 17,18.

The details from the physical side: whatever enters the mouth goes into the stomach, is digested, and eventually passes out of the body - no damage done. The heart is not affected at all. What issues from the mouth (the conversation) comes from what is within a person's heart.

Verses 19,20.

From the heart comes wicked conversation, schemes, murders, adulteries, sexual sins, thefts, false testimonies, abusive speeches. The deeds follow the words, from the origination in the sinful heart. All are within the heart, though not all necessarily spoken. These things defile a man, but to eat with unrinsed hands does not defile a man. Case closed.

Lesson XXVII

Matthew 15:21-28. The Canaanite Woman.

21 ¶ Then Jesus went thence, and departed into the coasts of Tyre and Sidon.

22 And, behold, a woman of Canaan came out of the same coasts, and cried unto him, saying, Have mercy on me, O Lord, thou Son of David; my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil.

23 But he answered her not a word. And his disciples came and besought him, saying, Send her away; for she crieth after us.

24 But he answered and said, I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel.

25 Then came she and worshipped him, saying, Lord, help me.

26 But he answered and said, It is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it to dogs.

27 And she said, Truth, Lord: yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters' table.

28 Then Jesus answered and said unto her, O woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt. And her daughter was made whole from that very hour.

Verses 21,22.

Jesus withdraws from that area (near Capernaum) and travels into strictly Gentile territory toward the Mediterranean coastline in the district of the cities of Tyre and Sidon. He was seeking seclusion, but He was recognized by a Canaanite woman from that area. It is assumed that He was in a house, and she came there, and started crying out, "Have mercy on me, O Lord, thou Son of David; my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil." She with respect and reverence calls Him Lord and Messiah (Son of David). 'constantly' indicates crying continuously - her child's condition is severe and she is desperate.

Verse 23.

Jesus ignores her. We will shortly see that this has a purpose and a lesson. The disciples came, complaining about this woman becoming a nuisance. She kept shouting after them. Jesus must send her away.

Verse 24.

He answered, "I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel." He refuses to do what the disciples ask - to send the woman away, and now speaks to her. Obviously a Gentile He now deals with her, showing the disciples that He was to be Savior of all people. He challenged them, and her.

Verse 25.

She came falling at His feet and saying, "Lord help me." Her

Lesson XXVII Continued

desperation was so extreme that she only said 'help me', meaning herself and her daughter as one.

Verse 26.

Jesus did not immediately give in. He wished to test her faith. It wasn't proper to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs. These were pet dogs kept in the house. The blessings of Israel should not be given to those outside the family. As in other instances, Jesus always had a very important reason for delay (the best example may be His delay in going to Lazarus, that something much greater would take place). In this case He was forcing this foreign woman to think carefully about what she was asking, considering who she was, and who she represented.

Verse 27.

She is not insulted, but takes up the expression to her own advantage. Her witty reply speaks of the house dogs eating some of the scraps that fall from their master's table. No pet is going to starve but will be provided for. She has not moved, not swayed, not given up. This is faith persevering. She would not go until Jesus blessed her. (Jacob had done a similar thing when wrestling with the angel.) She knew she had come to the Only One who could help her.

Verse 28.

Jesus pronounced His approval: "O woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt." Her daughter was then healed. Jesus has also praised the faith of the centurion, a soldier of Rome (8:10).

Matthew 15:29-39. Healing and Feeding.

29 ¶ And Jesus departed from thence, and came nigh unto the sea of Galilee; and went up into a mountain, and sat down there.

30 And great multitudes came unto him, having with them those that were lame, blind, dumb, maimed, and many others, and cast them down at Jesus' feet; and he healed them:

31 insomuch that the multitude wondered, when they saw the dumb to speak, the maimed to be whole, the lame to walk, and the blind to see: and they glorified the God of Israel.

32 ¶ Then Jesus called his disciples unto him, and said, I have compassion on the multitude, because they continue with me now three days, and have nothing to eat: and I will not send them away fasting, lest they faint in the way.

33 And his disciples say unto him, Whence should we have so much bread in the wilderness, as to fill so great a multitude?

34 And Jesus saith unto them, How many loaves have ye? And they said, Seven, and a few little fishes.

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35 And he commanded the multitude to sit down on the ground.

36 And he took the seven loaves and the fishes, and gave thanks, and brake them, and gave to his disciples, and the disciples to the multitude.

37 And they did all eat, and were filled: and they took up of the broken meat that was left seven baskets full.

38 And they that did eat were four thousand men, beside women and children.

39 And he sent away the multitude, and took ship, and came into the coasts of Mag'dala.

Verse 29.

No time references in any Gospel mentions how long Jesus may have journeyed in Gentile territory, nothing eventful enough to mention having occurred. We now take up the story on His return to the Sea of Galilee. This is thought to be the southeastern, and less populated shore of the Sea. There He climbed a hill and sat down.

Verses 30,31.

The news of Jesus' location traveled quickly throughout that area. As the news traveled people having serious needs started coming to Him. Friends and families carrying those that couldn't come by themselves: the lame, blind, crippled, the dumb, and many others. They all believed that Jesus could and would heal them. Jesus healed them as they were laid at His feet. Though this was Gentile territory Jesus healed them. The record is simple. They had needs only Jesus could meet, and He did so in quiet, unquestioning compassion. They came with hope and were astonished. The dumb spoke, the crippled were restored, the lame walked, the blind saw. These were happening continuously, all around. What a sight, what sounds!

The people (being Gentiles) glorified the God of Israel. Many from this area had traveled to Galilee to see Jesus (4:2,25). Now Jesus had come to them. This was another example performed by Jesus to show the disciples as well as those present, that His mission was for and to all people. This pointed to the great commission and the church to spread around the world. Though not recorded, it seems completely reasonable that Jesus also spoke to these people about the love and mercy of God, the forgiveness of sin, about faith in Him.

Verse 32.

The first mention of time: Jesus mentions that the crowd had already been with Him for three days. Once there, they didn't want to leave. They were hearing and seeing things they could never have imagined. The opposite of catastrophes, a totally positive, uplifting, beautiful and loving event. The compassion of Christ now goes beyond the healings. Though people in those days commonly traveled with small amounts of food, by this time it would be all

Lesson XXVII Continued

gone. He didn't want to send them away in this condition, lest they collapse on the way. He expressed His compassion to His disciples. He wants them to also see and have compassion for these people. Again the disciples react on a purely physical level. They are in an uninhabited area, they had not seen any possible source for getting enough bread for this crowd. As in the previous, similar occasion, they are at a loss as to what they can do.

Verse 34.

Jesus asked them what they had: seven bread-cakes and a few fish. This should remind the disciples of the earlier occasion. This also set the stage for all to realize the absolutely miraculous nature of the feeding of (in this case) around 4,000 people.

Verses 35,36.

The people have been directed to sit in groups. Jesus gave thanks, then broke the bread and fish, and kept giving them to the disciples, and they in turn gave to the people.

Verses 37,38.

All ate and were filled. The left over pieces filled seven hampers which were much larger than the regular baskets mentioned in the earlier record of feeding the 5,000.

The importance of this second feeding miracle is that it showed Jesus' ability to repeat any miracle He chose to. It especially emphasized His compassion to those that came to Him for help, and in this case, even a crowd of non-Israelites.

Verse 39.

After the feeding, Jesus sent the crowd away. Jesus and the disciples stepped into the boat and journeyed to the region of Mag'dala. They traveled from the eastern shore of the Sea to the western shore somewhere south of the Plain of Gennesaret where a cave named Talmanutha was located. This was back on the predominantly Jewish side of the Sea, and much more densely populated area.

Matthew 16:1-4. Religious Leaders Back.

1 The Pharisees also with the Sadducees came, and tempting desired him that he would show them a sign from heaven.

2 He answered and said unto them, When it is evening, ye say, It will be fair weather: for the sky is red.

3 And in the morning, It will be foul weather today: for the sky is red and lowering. O ye hypocrites, ye can discern the face of the sky; but can ye not discern the signs of the times?

4 A wicked and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given unto it, but the sign of the prophet Jonah.

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And he left them, and departed.

This time Matthew observes that the Pharisees are now joined by the Sadducees. The differences between the two parties have already been noted. That they are now together speaks to what both now see as a serious threat against the status quo - namely Jesus. His ministry had become much more widely known, and especially the miracles. Here Matthew clearly states that their only motivation was to tempt Jesus, to give Him a test, expecting Him to fail. And if He didn't, we can be sure they would ascribe whatever He did to the supernatural power of satan (as they had previously).

Their asking for a sign from heaven also indicates that they were discounting all of the miracles of healing, casting out of demons, the teaching about the kingdom of God, as if these were not enough to convince them that Jesus was sent by God, and that He was doing God's work. They also ignored the prophecies in the Old Testament that spoke of what Jesus was doing. By asking Jesus for a further sign, just for them, they wished to embarrass Jesus, while in effect they were embarrassing themselves before those who knew and had been with Jesus. They obviously did not believe the myriad of witnesses to these miracles and teaching and demanded their own special sign - from the sky, no less. The word 'pompous' comes to mind.

Verses 2,3.

Jesus of course read their hearts and knew their true motives. As was His custom, rather than berating them, lashing out at them, He proceeds to teach them the truth they had missed, the reality of the situation, physically and spiritually, that they could not see or understand.

He begins by describing the everyday example of observing signs of changing weather conditions. This was one thing they spent time doing and were good at. They daily watch the appearance of the sky, but the signs of the times they could not interpret. Their ministry of Jesus was completely new in the world. It manifested the power of God and His love toward man. Jesus taught the people about God's love and forgiveness, of repentance, and reconciliation. Had all these things been done in a corner, that they could not see and hear, perceive and understand?

Verse 4.

That they would always demand some further sign marked them as an evil and adulterous generation. The ultimate sign that Jesus would show the world was like unto that of Jonah - as dead three days in the belly of the whale, and tossed upon the shore the third day as if from death. After these very men participated in His condemnation and death, He will rise again, showing finally and for all time the

Lesson XXVII Continued

conquering of death, resurrection, unto life eternal at the right hand of God the Father. Indeed the Sadducees did not accept any resurrection.

Jesus leaves them, no doubt speechless, to ponder over what He told them. They had the chance to see the light and accept Him for Who He was, but there is no record if any did so. He went His way and they were left to go their own.

Matthew 16:5-12. The Yeast of the Pharisees and the Sadducees.

5 ¶ And when his disciples were come to the other side, they had forgotten to take bread.

6 Then Jesus said unto them, Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees.

7 And they reasoned among themselves, saying, It is because we have taken no bread.

8 Which when Jesus perceived, he said unto them, O ye of little faith, why reason ye among yourselves, because ye have brought no bread?

9 Do ye not yet understand, neither remember the five loaves of the five thousand, and how many baskets ye took up?

10 neither the seven loaves of the four thousand, and how many baskets ye took up?

11 How is it that ye do not understand that I spake it not to you concerning bread, that ye should beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees?

12 Then understood they how that he bade them not beware of the leaven of bread, but of the doctrine of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees.

Verses 5,6.

Now having left the western shore of the Sea of Galilee they traveled back across to the Northeastern shore. They had forgotten to buy provisions (bread). Mark 8:14 mentions them having only one bread-cake. Jesus was thinking about their recent confrontation, this time with the Sadducees joining the Pharisees. They were both settled in their conviction of their righteousness in working out their own salvation according to their traditions and outward performance of their own standards. Their traditions were taught to the next generation as the way they must live to please God also. The Sadducees now joined them to maintain their worldly status and wealth, against the One who they saw as threatening this position.

Jesus is warning His disciples against their teaching having any influence over their thinking or beliefs. He calls their teaching yeast, as having the effect of once introduced, working its way throughout their mind and therefore, adversely influencing their lives and the lives of others.

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Verse 7.

The disciples only picked up on the word 'yeast' and began feeling guilty for not bringing bread with them. They thought Jesus was warning them against accepting any bread from the Pharisees or Sadducees, as a way of reminding them of what they forgot. The true spiritual meaning was not understood. They could only grasp the normal human, physical meaning.

Verses 8-10.

Jesus noticed that they were only understanding that He was talking about bread. He calls them men of little faith and proceeds to remind them of the miracle of feeding the 5,000, and the 4,000, and the amount of leftovers that they had themselves picked up. How could they have completely forgotten such miracles of feeding such multitudes, and now think Jesus is worried about a little bread? Why do they even conceive that He is now not able to amply provide for their physical needs?

Verses 11,12.

He explains again what He said regarding the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees. Only Matthew records this. The yeast of these groups was their teaching. Their teachings would act as yeast, invisible at first but continuing to grow in influence until it affected the whole mind and life of anyone that listened to them. This shows the insidious nature of false teaching. Paul repeatedly warns against giving any heed to any such false doctrine. The way to keep safe is to test any doctrine according to Scripture, as to whether it be of God or man.

Lesson XXVIII

Matthew 16:13-20. Peter's Confession: Christ's Reply.

13 ¶ When Jesus came into the coasts of Caesare'a Phil'ippi, he asked his disciples, saying, Whom do men say that I, the Son of man, am?
14 And they said, Some say that thou art John the Baptist; some, Eli'jah; and others, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets.
15 He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am?
16 And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.
17 And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven.
18 And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.
19 And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.
20 Then charged he his disciples that they should tell no man that he was Jesus the Christ.

As before, Jesus had been teaching by word and deed about the Kingdom of heaven to the disciples; about love, forgiveness, and compassion for others, whether Jew or Gentile. Now He is spending more time alone with the disciples and preparing them about His coming sacrifice on the cross. He begins revealing to them who He is: the suffering servant, the Messiah, the prophet like unto Moses. As the High Priest, He will soon be offering up Himself for the salvation of sinners.

Verse 13.

This was not the familiar Caesarea, but a place that the tetrarch Phillip had renovated and built up and then named in honor of Caesar Augustus Caesarea of Phillip was added to distinguish it from the greater seaport with the same name. It was located near one of the streams that ran into the Jordan River. Mt. Hermon was in the background nearby - over 9,000 ft. high, and covered with snow most of the year. This less populated and picturesque region was Jesus' choice for prayer and instruction: a place of privacy and quietness.

At this place, Jesus poses the question to them about what they have heard the people saying about who they think He is. He already had in mind the second question. This was prelude. He was leading them to the truth about Himself. The time had come to begin making all things clear to them.

Verse 14.

As we've heard before, some thought He was John the Baptist

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brought back to life. Others thought He was Elijah, and one group even thought Jesus might be forerunner of the Messiah, implied in Malachi 4:5. Others mentioned Jeremiah as a possibility. Others that He was one of the prophets risen again (Luke 9:19). They at least considered Him sent by God, while some of the religious leaders had accused Him of being with Beelzebub (10:25).

Verse 15.

Now, the most important question. Who do the disciples say that He is? Jesus begins the question directly. "But you." This was direct and personal, the "you" - being plural - included all the disciples. Peter chooses to answer for the group as spokesman.

Verse 16.

"Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." Simon Peter's whole name is recorded to emphasize the importance of the words he spoke.

"The Christ" included being The Anointed One, Mediator, Prophet, High priest, eternal King.

"Son of God" means the unique relationship with God from the beginning. The living God - the source of all life.

Verse 17.

Jesus answers Peter in a greatly appreciative and thankful way. He calls him "Blessed", realizing that this simple, completely human man had been shown the truth by His Father. He calls him Bar-Jonah (meaning son of Jonah, a variation of John) to remind him that he is the son of a human father. By his flesh and blood Simon could not have conceived of this spiritual truth. In calling him blessed so are those who agree with what Peter has spoken.

Jesus speaks saying 'my' Father, thus expressing the close and loving relationship with Him. The words 'in heaven' go further to identify His Father as the God of heaven, the creator of the Universe and everything in it.

Verse 18.

Jesus continues: "And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church..." Jesus will build His church. Jesus will do the building and the church will always be only His and that forever. The present statement is the direct result of the previous one by Peter - that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God. That is the foundation of the church, Jesus Christ. That Peter confesses this makes Peter (the rock) a beginning part of that building. A rock on the foundation of Christ.

From that point, the church has been added to by every believer as also a rock. Just as every believer becomes part of the living body of Christ. As the record of Peter's preaching in Acts

Lesson XXVIII Continued

shows, he brought a great many into the church, all upon the foundation of his proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

So also the other apostles, and all that follow after. All were used in building - gathering and nurturing, maturing and strengthening - His church. Each believer can be described as a 'living stone'. It also must be remembered that it was the Holy Spirit that revealed the truth about Jesus to Peter, and the same Spirit that empowered him (as well as the others) at Pentecost to preach the Gospel, where 3,000 were converted (Acts 2:41).

"...and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." This means that satan and his demons cannot overpower or destroy Christ's followers, the church universal.

Verse 19.

These words are addressed to Peter as representing the group, and by extension, the church.

"And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven..." The doors were opened by preaching the Gospel, all those who accepted it were brought in. Those who rejected or neglected it were kept out (the doors closed).

The use of church discipline also involved the closing the doors to some to bring about repentance and reconciliation. Then, if successful, the doors would be opened again.

Now, the continuation of explanation. Jesus now speaks to "whatsoever" will be permitted or forbidden. There must be rules of beliefs and conduct for the Church to maintain its purity and mission. For a member of the church to go against or do things not permitted, then they must be disciplined. If they repented, they would be welcomed back into fellowship. If not, they would be banned. Peter (representing the 12) is assured that whatever the church decides (binds or looses, forbids or permits) on earth shall be so also in heaven. It must be understood that all such decisions must be based firmly on the Word of God, specifically the teachings of Jesus.

Verse 20.

Then He gave strict orders not to tell anyone that He was the Christ. The common belief was that the role of the promised Messiah was as a political deliverer to free the nation from Roman oppression. This outcry would precipitate an untimely clash and confrontation with the Jewish leaders. When the proper time arrives, Jesus will announce Who He is Himself. His role was not for popularity or political power or status. He had come as the Lamb of God, savior of His people. His death, resurrection, and ascension will confirm forever that He completed perfectly the mission He was given by the Father. This is the message Peter will powerfully proclaim.

Lesson XXVIII Continued

Matthew 16:21-28. Christ First Predicts His Death and Resurrection.

21 ¶ From that time forth began Jesus to show unto his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day.

22 Then Peter took him, and began to rebuke him, saying, Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall not be unto thee.

23 But he turned, and said unto Peter, Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offense unto me: for thou savorest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men.

24 ¶ Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.

25 For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it.

26 For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?

27 For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then he shall reward every man according to his works.

28 Verily I say unto you, There be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, till they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom.

This was the plan for man's salvation from before the founding of the world, in the divine counsels of the Trinity. Jesus begins to explain the plan to His disciples, using clear and plain language. In this way, they will know that God the Father's will was to be carried out in every detail, and their faith should grow stronger to see the hand of God and the actions of Jesus fulfill every prophecy. And also that each and every player that took part was fully responsible for their actions and will be held accountable for them.

Verse 21.

The plan included going up to Jerusalem, suffer many things from the elders, chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day, be raised up. After God had revealed to Peter that Jesus was the Christ, now Jesus had acknowledged to the disciples that He was the promised Messiah. He must bring them to understand His role as the Suffering Servant - the Messiah Who saves His people from their sins (and be raised up). This was not the Messiah they expected. They had seen His power over even nature, as well as demons. They had seen the many miracles of healing and restoration. They had heard His words about the kingdom of God and its coming.

This must have been a totally shocking and unimaginable announcement: painful, tragic, bewildering, confusing. Where would

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that leave them? And possibly, worst of all, this must happen in Jerusalem, and at the hands of the most powerful leaders of the nation, the Sanhedrin, the scribes, the Pharisees, and the Sadducees (high priests). Jesus only mentions that He must suffer many things at their hands. More details would have been too much for the disciples to bear at this time. Then the close - the resurrection on the third day. That the disciples did not grasp this is seen at this time and even after it took place, but they would be reminded of this prediction by the angel, and the risen Christ.

Verse 22.

The immediate human reaction by Peter as the impetuous spokesman was to rebuke Jesus for even suggesting such a terrible thing, that this will never happen to Him. From the human point of view it was by far the worst possible outcome.

It appears that Peter was walking behind Jesus, and tries to pull Him aside to tell Him not to say such things. He "began" indicates that he is not allowed to continue.

Verse 23.

But Jesus turns around, facing Peter, and rebukes him saying, "Get thee behind me, Satan..." The sense is "be gone" or "get lost". Peter's words, attributed as coming from the evil one himself, were exactly what satan desired. They were a temptation and attempt to turn Jesus aside from His mission of salvation. Jesus did not need to hear this, and especially from His own followers.

Jesus goes on to explain to Peter (and the others nearby) that what Peter said was a trap to Him. Peter was not expressing God's point of view, but that of the world, which was also the point of view of the god of this world - satan. Peter must realize this because it was harmful to Jesus and to His mission. Peter had no conception that what he had said would lead to the damnation of the whole human race. God must be eternally thanked for the transformation of Peter into the intensely committed and powerful preacher and writer that he became.

Verse 24.

Now addressing the whole group, Jesus explains what is to be expected of those who choose to follow Him. To deny one's self, to give up all the natural selfish pursuits of wealth, power, popularity, and building your own personal kingdom. This must change into a life as a child of God, forgiven by grace, thinking of and giving to others first. This includes the guidance of Christ's commandments and the Holy Spirit through the Word. By following Christ, we take up His cross, in the sense that we also will suffer persecution because we are His. This includes the willingness to die in His service as so many did in the beginning and throughout the

Lesson XXVIII Continued

years. Even today, in some areas, Christians are still being killed.

Verse 25.

What to the world is a paradox, to the Christian is of the highest spiritual truth.

"For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it."

Verse 26.

To explain this from the worldly point of view: imagine a man who spends his life building up a kingdom with everything the world offers - fame and fortune, a grand estate, a fleet of cars, hundreds of servants. And then he dies. Everything is left behind. The sum total of the value of his life is 0. He has left only eternal damnation.

On the other hand, one who lived for Jesus (even if his life is taken from him) will inherit the kingdom of God. He will also gain life eternal with the Son and the Father and all the saints before him. This is the ultimate experience of love that the Father offers to every human in the Gospel of His Son.

There is nothing a man can exchange for his life. There is no way a man can earn eternal life, since that is also based on selfishness and leads to pride. To earn and possess only leads to loss. Jesus wants everyone to make the right choice. He now is to explain how a life lived for Him will lead to eternal rewards.

Verse 27.

"For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then he shall reward every man according to his works."

God has given and will continue to give glory to His Son. He has given Him a retinue of holy angels. He also has given Him the job of judge of the works of each of His own for rewards.

The judgment will be based on two things:

- 1.) What amount of light (knowledge) has been received?
- 2.) What was done with the light received? (Luke 12:47,48.)

This will be measured by the works done.

Verse 28.

This is a solemn declaration. What He has just promised at the Rapture of the church is yet in the future. What He now describes is the beginning of the church. The majority of those there would not see death until they see Him coming in His royal dignity. This began at His resurrection, then His ascension unto the Father to sit at His right hand as King of Kings and Lord of Lords. It was in great glory that He ascended with a host of angels into the heavens.

Lesson XXIX

Matthew 17:1-13. The Transfiguration.

1 And after six days Jesus taketh Peter, James, and John his brother,
and bringeth them up into a high mountain apart,
2 and was transfigured before them: and his face did shine as the
sun, and his raiment was white as the light.
3 And, behold, there appeared unto them Moses and Eli'jah talking
with him.
4 Then answered Peter, and said unto Jesus, Lord, it is good for us
to be here: if thou wilt, let us make here three tabernacles; one for
thee, and one for Moses, and one for Eli'jah.
5 While he yet spake, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them: and
behold a voice out of the cloud, which said, This is my beloved Son,
in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him.
6 And when the disciples heard it, they fell on their face, and were
sore afraid.
7 And Jesus came and touched them, and said, Arise, and be not
afraid.
8 And when they had lifted up their eyes, they saw no man, save Jesus
only.
9 ¶ And as they came down from the mountain, Jesus charged them,
saying, Tell the vision to no man, until the Son of man be risen
again from the dead.
10 And his disciples asked him, saying, Why then say the scribes that
Eli'jah must first come?
11 And Jesus answered and said unto them, Eli'jah truly shall first
come, and restore all things.
12 But I say unto you, That Eli'jah is come already, and they knew
him not, but have done unto him whatsoever they listed. Likewise
shall also the Son of man suffer of them.
13 Then the disciples understood that he spake unto them of John the
Baptist.

This event had two main purposes. First, this was a message from the Father, full of assurance and love toward Jesus for the coming events leading to His crucifixion. It was also a brief picture of the glory that would follow. Second it was a divine confirmation to the three disciples of Who Jesus Is and the absolute truth concerning the divine plan of the Father which Jesus was carrying out. They would later be three witnesses to this event to the other disciples after the resurrection. (This is implied but not recorded in Scripture.)

Verse 1.

This occurrence happened six days after the previous conversation (at the end of Chapter 16).

On several occasions Jesus limited the number of disciples to

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witness the events to three. Each time He chose the same three, Peter, James, and his brother John. At the raising of Jairus' daughter, here, and in the Garden of Gethsemane were the three recorded. No explanation is given.

However, several observations can be made. These three were among Jesus' first disciples; they were closer to Jesus, and more sympathetic and understanding. To have had more witnesses would have made the situation easily become a topic of general conversation - these events required secrecy (here Jesus specifically commanded it), so that no adverse reactions would come out. The main thing certain is that Jesus chose these three to be witnesses to these unique events so they could later testify to their unique importance in the Gospel record.

The high mountain is not named but appears to have been Jebel Jermak in Upper Galilee, about 4,000 ft. above sea level. It was a relatively short way from Capernaum where Jesus went soon after the event (Mark 9:28,33).

Verse 2.

A change of appearance came over Jesus - His face shining as the sun, His clothing became white and radiantly dazzling. No source is mentioned at this point.

Verse 3.

Then the appearance of Moses and Elijah, and they were talking to Jesus. They were not only visible but also recognizable to the disciples. We are not told how they recognize them.

Luke 9:31 mentions they appeared also surrounded by glorious brightness as they spoke with Jesus about His exodus or departure. Why these two? Possibly that Moses represented the Law, and Elijah represented the prophets. Both of which Jesus had come to fulfill with His life, death, and rising again.

Verse 4.

The ever impetuous Peter speaks up in an emotional way, reacting to such a supernatural experience in an equally down to earth and human fashion. He is so overwhelmed by what he was seeing that he wants it to continue by making shelters for the glorified three: Jesus, Moses and Elijah. No mention about for himself or James and John. Nevertheless this suggestion completely misses the point of the visitation. They need no protection from the physical elements, and their visit was only to Jesus and only until their communication was complete. He did ask Jesus but what happened next eclipsed any need or answer.

Verse 5.

While Peter was still talking, a bright cloud suddenly

Lesson XXIX Continued

covered them. In Scripture this often indicates the presence of God (Exodus 13:21, 16:10, 40:35; Revelation 14:14-16. "...and behold a voice out of the cloud, which said, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him." With the addition of "hear ye him", these words are identical to those spoken at Jesus' baptism. At the former time, the Baptist and Jesus heard the words, but whether anyone else did is not mentioned. Here Jesus and the 3 disciples heard them. The disciples are told to keep listening to Jesus and take to heart His words. The great assurance of the Father's love is shown in His calling Jesus "my Son" and especially in calling Him "Beloved".

In II Peter 1:16,17 he much later in time wrote - "We were eye-witnesses of His majesty, ... He received honor and glory from God the Father."

This was a divinely encouraging and reaffirming event for the Beloved Son, but also for the increasing and strengthening of faith in the three witnesses. The voice from the cloud must have been unexpected and startling to the disciples. It must have also been awesome in sound (elsewhere described as the sound of many waters), and as not being a normal human voice (Genesis 3:10).

Their reaction was not surprising: they fell on their faces terribly in fear and trembling. This was one event they would never forget.

Verse 7.

Jesus sees their condition and goes to them, touching each one, reassuring them that there is no need for them to be afraid. He encourages them to get up off the ground.

Verse 8.

When they looked up only Jesus was in sight. By this time, the bright cloud and heavenly visitors are gone. Everything is back to normal, as is Jesus.

Verse 9.

Jesus warns them on the way down the mountain to not tell anyone what they have seen until after He is raised from the dead. This means specifically the other disciples. This event will only be correctly understood after the resurrection, as a necessary prelude to it.

Verse 10.

Having just seen Elijah in the Transfiguration, the disciples now have a major concern about Elijah's role in the coming of Messiah. The scribes teach (from Malachi 4:5,6) that Elijah must come. The fact that Jesus was now speaking about His own death and resurrection, after Peter's recognizing Him as Messiah, must have

Lesson XXIX Continued

been quite confusing in their minds. They didn't understand the idea of Messiah dying. That the scribes were teaching that Elijah must come first could be used against any who thought that Jesus was the Messiah also.

Verses 11,12.

Jesus explains that the scribes were correct. Elijah is going to come to earth at the time prophesied to bring a restoration. He was to be one of the two witnesses to Israel before the Second Coming of Christ to earth (detailed later in Revelation).

But the event described in Malachi was about the prophet who was to come in the power and spirit of Elijah as the herald of Christ's first coming as the Suffering Servant and Savior (Matthew 11:14; Luke 1:17). Of course this was John the Baptist. His ministry did turn a great many back to God, a change in minds, hearts, and lives. And indeed some of Christ's first disciples were first those that followed John. John pointed out Jesus to them as the Lamb of God that taketh away the sins of the world.

The majority and especially the leaders of the nation did not accept him as a prophet, or the herald of the Messiah. Eventually they turned against him. Finally he was imprisoned and killed.

Jesus then predicts that He also was about to suffer at the hands of the same people: the majority of the populace and the leaders, both political and religious. He also would suffer affliction and be killed.

Verse 13. At last, the disciples understood that Jesus (as previously in 11:14) was talking about the Baptist as His forerunner who had come with many similarities to Elijah: his simple manner of dress and diet, the wilderness, where he cried out his message from God.

Matthew 17:14-21. Healing An Epileptic Boy.

14 ¶ And when they were come to the multitude, there came to him a certain man, kneeling down to him, and saying,

15 Lord, have mercy on my son; for he is lunatic, and sore vexed: for oftentimes he falleth into the fire, and oft into the water.

16 And I brought him to thy disciples, and they could not cure him.

17 Then Jesus answered and said, O faithless and perverse generation, how long shall I be with you? how long shall I suffer you? bring him hither to me.

18 And Jesus rebuked the devil; and he departed out of him: and the child was cured from that very hour.

19 Then came the disciples to Jesus apart, and said, Why could not we cast him out?

20 And Jesus said unto them, Because of your unbelief: for verily I

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say unto you, If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove: and nothing shall be impossible unto you.

21 Howbeit this kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting.

Down from the mountain and the brilliant light and reassuring words from the Father, we come to an earthly father crying out for his suffering son.

Verses 14,15.

While Jesus and the three that were with Him were on the mountain, a crowd had gathered. They were waiting for them to return. From this crowd a certain man came up to Jesus and knelt down in front of Him. It is implied that his son is with him. Mark 9:14 mentions that scribes were there also arguing with the other nine disciples about their inability to heal the boy.

The man begs for pity, describing his son's condition as severe suffering - falling into the fire and into the water. He had to be watched constantly but accidents could not always be prevented. Epileptics have violent convulsions, foaming at the mouth, teeth-grinding. This boy was unable to hear or speak. All this was caused by a demon that was controlling him. (Demon possession.) (Matthew 17:18.)

Verse 16.

The Father appealed to Christ's pity and compassion. He now raises a question. He had brought him to the disciples, who were unable to cure the boy. Though the disciples had previously been sent out to heal and cast out evil spirits, they had been successful (Matthew 10:1; Mark 6:13; Luke 9:6-10). As far as from what the Gospel record shows, this was the first time they had failed.

Verse 17.

Jesus reacts. He expresses His frustration with the entire crowd of people present. He calls them a faithless and perverse generation: the father, the scribes, and the general population always seeking their own benefit and entertainment. Specifically and more pointedly He also includes His own disciples. The time He has left to deal with them is shortening. What amount of time would or should it take them to have faith in Him? His trust in His Father was pure and certain. These men's faith in Him was so very far below that, even after almost 3 years of being with Him. It was painful to 'put up' with them.

Nevertheless, Jesus' love and compassion for anyone suffering caused Him to ask that the boy be brought to Him.

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Verse 18.

Jesus rebuked the demon, it came out of him, and from that very moment the boy was cured. Mark, in 9:20-27, records the details of the father's prayer for more faith, the boy's final spasms, then stillness, and Jesus lifting him up.

Verse 19.

Later, after the crowds had gone, the disciples gathered around Jesus with deep concern for their inability to help the boy by casting out the demon.

Verse 20.

Simply put: because of their little faith! They should have continued in prayer and not given up when the demon didn't leave immediately. Perseverance was necessary.

Jesus goes on to teach a lesson. He begins by saying that what He is about to say is a very serious truth. He contrasts the size of faith (like a mustard seed) to what it can move (a mountain). He points to a nearby mountain, and we can imagine Him gesturing, as He says "Move from here to there, and it shall move..." The point seems to be that even the smallest faith, when united with God, brings the inexhaustible and infinite resources of God's power, love, and wisdom. This brings the potential to do great things - according to God's Word, Will, and purposes.

This must be understood figuratively. The mustard seed symbolizes a small amount of faith with a person. The mountain symbolizes a large amount of difficulties or obstacles to doing God's work. They are rightly perceived as impossible.

Jesus adds, "and nothing shall be impossible to you." No task assigned by Jesus will be impossible when faith enjoins the trust and complete dependence on God: "with God all things are possible" (19:26).

Verse 21.

"Howbeit this kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting." This verse is not found in the best manuscripts. Probably inserted from Mark 9:29.

Matthew 17:22-27. The 2nd Passion Prediction and the Temple Tax.

22 ¶ And while they abode in Galilee, Jesus said unto them, The Son of man shall be betrayed into the hands of men:

23 and they shall kill him, and the third day he shall be raised again. And they were exceeding sorry.

24 ¶ And when they were come to Caper'na-um, they that received tribute money came to Peter, and said, Doth not your master pay

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tribute?

25 He saith, Yes. And when he was come into the house, Jesus prevented him, saying, What thinkest thou, Simon? of whom do the kings of the earth take custom or tribute? of their own children, or of strangers?

26 Peter saith unto him, Of strangers. Jesus saith unto him, Then are the children free.

27 Notwithstanding, lest we should offend them, go thou to the sea, and cast a hook, and take up the fish that first cometh up; and when thou hast opened his mouth, thou shalt find a piece of money: that take, and give unto them for me and thee.

Verses 22,23.

Still in Galilee, Jesus and His disciples continued to travel, spending more time avoiding crowds, especially concerning the certainty of the coming passion. He will be treated like a common criminal - to be delivered unto the hands of men. Men already mentioned as elders, priests, and scribes were evil and corrupt. They would not be satisfied until He was put to death. And on the third day He shall be raised up. The disciples still could see no reason for Jesus to be killed, much less that He accepted or chose to follow this path. As unthinkable His death was, the mention of being raised up the third day was beyond their ability to even take in, much less understand. Their response is recorded: "And they were deeply sorry." Mark 9:32 adds, "They were afraid to ask Him."

Verse 24.

The Temple Tax. After a long time of traveling, Jesus and The Twelve returned to Capernaum where Jesus had His headquarters and where Peter also lived. Obviously learning of their return, the tax collectors catch up with them. This was not a Roman Tax. This tax was for the maintenance of the Sanctuary. Every Israelite 20 years and over was required to pay half a shekel, about two day's wages. The collectors approached Peter first. No reason is given. Perhaps because he was recognized as leader of the 12. They recognized Jesus as Peter's teacher. They ask if Jesus paid the "double drachma" (the Greek coin equal to the half shekel).

Verse 25.

Peter answers directly that, yes, He does. This conversation appears to have taken place on the street. Now Peter goes to where Jesus is staying, ready to relate the matter. To his obvious surprise, when he enters, Jesus speaks to him first. He asks the question: "What thinkest thou, Simon? of whom do the kings of the earth take custom or tribute? of their own children, or of strangers?" Jesus is suggesting that as the Son of God, He is not obliged to pay this tax. The king and his regime are maintained by

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taxing others, sometimes only foreigners.

Verse 26.

Peter answers, from foreigners. Jesus replied, "Then are the children free." Peter was also a son by adoption, therefore also free, or exempt from paying the tax.

Verse 27.

Since this was one of God's holy laws, Jesus did not want to cause these collectors to sin by He and Peter not paying them. Jesus already knows where the money is to come from. Simon must go to the sea and only throw in a hook. The first fish he hooks, he will open its mouth and find a stater (four drachma or shekel). This will pay the tax for both Jesus and Peter. We may accept that this is exactly what takes place.

This can only be explained by Jesus' supernatural and penetrating knowledge and control over nature. Also, His willingness to go beyond obligation, and consider others.

Lesson XXX

Matthew 18:1-14. Kindness to Children.

- 1 At the same time came the disciples unto Jesus, saying, Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?
- 2 And Jesus called a little child unto him, and set him in the midst of them,
- 3 and said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.
- 4 Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven.
- 5 And whoso shall receive one such little child in my name receiveth me.
- 6 ¶ But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea.
- 7 Woe unto the world because of offenses! for it must needs be that offenses come; but woe to that man by whom the offense cometh!
- 8 Wherefore if thy hand or thy foot offend thee, cut them off, and cast them from thee: it is better for thee to enter into life halt or maimed, rather than having two hands or two feet to be cast into everlasting fire.
- 9 And if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: it is better for thee to enter into life with one eye, rather than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire.
- 10 ¶ Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you, That in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven.
- 11 For the Son of man is come to save that which was lost.
- 12 How think ye? if a man have a hundred sheep, and one of them be gone astray, doth he not leave the ninety and nine, and goeth into the mountains, and seeketh that which is gone astray?
- 13 And if so be that he find it, verily I say unto you, he rejoiceth more of that sheep, than of the ninety and nine which went not astray.
- 14 Even so it is not the will of your Father which is in heaven, that one of these little ones should perish.

Verse 1.

Matthew abbreviates this incident. Luke records that still on the way to Christ's abode in Capernaum, the disciples were arguing among themselves about their status in the kingdom of heaven. Jesus had asked what they had been talking about but no one answered. Finally they came forward with the question (Luke 9:46). "Who then is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?"

Amazing that this selfish concern comes so soon after Christ's 2nd prediction of His death, when they were so sorrowful. In patience and compassion and love, Jesus does not rebuke them but uses

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the question to teach them a necessary spiritual truth from God Who reads men's hearts.

Verses 2-4.

Here Jesus again shows His deep love for children. He accepts them as embodiments of the very virtues that everyone needs in order to please God and come to faith in Himself as Savior. That there was a child nearby says something in itself. Jesus calls the little child to stand in the middle of these grown men. Luke adds that he stood beside Jesus (Luke 9:47) and then Jesus takes him in His arms (9:36). This would certainly put the child at ease.

The disciples' question related in who would be greatest means who would end up 'lording' himself over his fellows. They wanted personal power and authority over others. The question includes, what would they be willing to do to arrive at that position. Jesus proceeds to say that that way of thinking would exclude them from the kingdom.

A solemn declaration - the qualities they needed were to be seen in little children. They must turn their attention, thinking, acting in this direction. They must turn from worldly ambition. They must be converted by God, thus by His power becoming like little children. The qualities of little children must include: simplicity of motive, frankness, sincerity, humility, dependence, trust, and obedience. The humble recognition of one's sin and need of a Savior, as well as trust and faith in the One Who offers it, and then thankful living by sharing with others are all included.

The positive statement of the answer: "Whoever becomes humble like this little child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven." This was also the example that Jesus lived out in His ministry: teaching the truth about God's love, healing, encouraging, feeding, sharing, helping in every way. On the other side, never doing anything hurtful or destructive, never telling others to do what He was unwilling to do, never asking for or demanding political or other power or authority. This list could go on, but the point being, Jesus was the Servant of all, and had no ambition to be great in the ways of the world. The measure in His kingdom was that the one greatest is the greatest servant: to be accounted good and faithful.

Verse 5.

Anyone who welcomes any born-again believer (who shows the qualities of a little child) is also welcoming Jesus to Whom he belongs. This calls us to be no respecters of persons according to worldly values. Even a little child has the same value as any other Christian and by extension as Jesus Himself. The person who welcomes must welcome in Christ's Name. It is not possible to separate the Lord from His own. (Acts 9:4,5; Romans 8:35-39.)

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Verse 6.

Serious warning. To not welcome, but cause one of these little ones to sin will bring great condemnation. Anyone (inside or outside of the church) who even tries to lead one of God's children (any believer) astray commits a sin most vile. The consequences are so bad that it would be better for the guilty one to have a large millstone hung around his neck and be drowned in the deepest part of the sea. There would be no chance of getting away. This implies that the eternal fate of such a person will be torment in the lake of fire.

Verse 7.

Through temptation sin entered the world and continues to plague mankind. Its source was and still is the devil, whose wiles are many (Ephesians 6:11). We in turn must be vigilant against worldly temptations, and against also tempting others. Jesus adds that temptations must come - but woe to those through whom it comes. (Luke 22:22).

Verses 8,9.

Jesus repeats the admonitions of chapter 5:29,30 in a slightly different order, with some variation.

The point is the same: a person must take very drastic steps to prevent them from giving in to known temptations. The most important thing is to enter into eternal life and avoid everlasting fire. Using these shocking, cutting ideas forces the listener to understand how deadly serious the issue is - one's eternal destination. Of course Jesus is not suggesting the actual carrying out of these measures, but to force people to face its seriousness. At the same time recognizing that in the mind, heart, and will of a person is where temptation must be controlled and resisted.

The natural corollary is that one who controls and resists their own temptation will be prevented from tempting others, especially Christ's 'little ones'.

Verse 10.

The great sin of pride, the exalting of one's self, brings with it the looking down on and lording it over others. Another word for it is scorn. This is the opposite of what a believer is to do. The other is to be counted as better than oneself.

Jesus warns to take care not to look down on even a single one. He solemnly confirms with all divine authority what He is about to tell them: in heaven, God has angels that are given the responsibility to watch over each of His children, especially the little ones. Angels are described as joyful when a sinner repents (Luke 15:10).

They attended to Christ after the temptation and in the Garden.

Lesson XXX Continued

They appeared with news of the resurrection; they watch over the redeemed and render service to them in many ways (Matthew 13:41; 25:31,32; Luke 15:10; 16:21; I Corinthians 4:9; Galatians 3:19; II Thessalonians 1:7; I Peter 1:12; Hebrews 1:14). They belong to the Father, and are perfectly obedient to Him.

Verse 11.

After mentioning the role of angels, now Jesus introduces His own role in coming to save that which is lost, even the souls of men. This in turn introduces the parable of the lost sheep. A more extended version is in Luke 15:3-7. Jesus grabs their attention by posing a question for them to think about - therefore they must listen carefully.

Verse 12.

"How think ye? if a man have a hundred sheep, and one of them be gone astray, doth he not leave the ninety and nine, and goeth into the mountains, and seeketh that which is gone astray?"

This would also have brought to mind the role of Jehovah being His people's Shepherd (23rd Psalm). As this role of the Father, so also the role of the Son. Jehovah, and Jesus, just as the good shepherd always goes after the wandering sheep. This in turn should be the role and desire of the disciples, and not on who will be the greatest.

Verse 13.

"And if so be that he find it..." - for not all lost sheep are found. So when a lost sheep is found there shall be rejoicing. The joy of saving a stray sheep from danger and possible death is much greater than the feeling of possession of the 99.

Verse 14.

Jesus now relates this to the Heavenly Father Who does not will that any little ones should perish. For this work He has sent the Son to save those that have gone astray. It is God's will that all should come to Him through the Gospel of His Son, and not perish but be saved.

As an example, a straying member of a church Jesus lays down guidelines for reconciliation. This brings the 'brother' back into the loving relationship that Christ mandates for the church.

Matthew 18:15-20. Church Discipline.

15 ¶ Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother.

16 But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more,

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that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.

17 And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as a heathen man and a publican.

18 Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.

19 Again I say unto you, That if two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven.

20 For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.

Verse 15.

When a brother sins against you, go and show him his fault while you are alone with him. The intent must be to privately make the person aware of the injury in the spirit of brotherly love. Then that forgiveness is asked for and given - thus the two are reconciled.

"...If he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother."

To have the right attitude when disciplining another, one must first practice self-discipline. One must examine oneself and honestly realize one's own faults and failings before pointing out another's. This brings humility. One on one is the first step, but if the grievance is not settled there, the next step must be taken.

Verse 16.

If the one in the wrong will not admit guilt and repent, the next step is to take one or two others with you. The case must be serious enough to bring in others. If it was frivolous - those asked would refuse to go along.

The lawful point is quoted from Deuteronomy 19:15 "in order that by the mouth of two witnesses or three every matter may be established."

The brother is again confronted with his wrong, but with 3 or 4 in agreement with the one wronged, it has much greater chance of convincing the sinner of his wrong. If this does not succeed in reconciliation, then the matter must be taken before the whole assembly of the church. Then the witnesses can vouch for the offended brother's case, and his previous attempts at resolution.

Verse 17.

"And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church..." The church certainly includes the leader - preacher and deacons, but also the whole congregation. Matters of church discipline have been handled, or mishandled, all through church history. The worst abuses were when a small group, professional

Lesson XXX Continued

clergy, boards, elders, councils, take matters in their own hands and disregard the rest of the membership.

Jesus proceeds to describe the judgment of the whole assembly as being presented against the offender - and he refuses to listen, then only one final step must be taken. He must be treated as one who is unconverted. Two examples are given: a foreigner and a tax-collector. They are outside the fellowship of the church of believers. The impenitent person must now be treated as one of these, having lost the right to church membership. With this drastic rejection it is also possible that it will shock the impenitent to the realization of the seriousness of his sin, and the pain of losing the loving fellowship with this body of believers. And this could bring him to repentance, and then he can be welcomed back into fellowship, and a brother is brought back into the fold.

This also dramatically shows the serious need for church discipline to maintain the high standards of Christian life demanded by Jesus in those who would follow Him. He commanded us to love one another. This is an action word, not just a warm feeling in the tummy. It is something you do, and practice, and work at. Sometimes it requires strong measures to keep a congregation together that the bond of love remains intact. We have all seen and heard of many cases where churches have broken apart, split, and become intolerable because no church discipline is practiced.

There is always the danger of setting up a list of rules that can become another form of legalism. There should not be strict regulations concerning details of personal conduct (hairstyle, jewelry, clothing etc.). However, there must be guidelines of faith and conduct based on Biblical principles and the clear teaching concerning the church in the New Testament. These principles must not be violated - they must be bound. Whatever they permit must be allowed - or loosed. Exclusion or readmission closes the subject.

Verse 18.

Jesus now speaks to the disciples as a group representing the church. They must be solemn and very serious about the principles of governing the church, that it will survive in truth and purity hold on to the principles contained in Jesus' teaching. Church discipline is necessary to keep the Gospel Message pure and undefiled, and keep the believers in loving fellowship. Thus they may grow and mature and share their faith and their means with others, and spreading the Word of God's grace and love and forgiveness through His Son.

This saying He had previously spoken to Peter in 16:19. This is how serious the principles of the church are. What is forbidden in the church will be forbidden in heaven. What is allowed in the church will be allowed in heaven.

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Verse 19.

Similar to the preceding verse: action by a true group of believers (church) on earth is confirmed in heaven. In this verse, if two agree in prayer on earth, asking something of the Father in heaven, it will be answered by Him. This may be considered as in relation to the wisdom and guidance concerning church discipline. It must also be considered as within all the characteristics of true prayer that Jesus taught. Among these are humble childlike faith and trust, sincerity, with love, subject to God's will, in perseverance, and in Christ's Name. This will be true if there be only two together.

Verse 20.

Here two or three are gathered in His Name, and He will be in their midst. This is Christ's assurance that any number of believers gathered in prayer and worship will be blessed by His presence in close fellowship. He will impart strength, guidance, protection, assurance, and peace in love.

Lesson XXXI

Matthew 18:21-35. The Unmerciful Servant.

21 ¶ Then came Peter to him, and said, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times?

22 Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven.

23 ¶ Therefore is the kingdom of heaven likened unto a certain king, which would take account of his servants.

24 And when he had begun to reckon, one was brought unto him, which owed him ten thousand talents.

25 But forasmuch as he had not to pay, his lord commanded him to be sold, and his wife, and children, and all that he had, and payment to be made.

26 The servant therefore fell down, and worshipped him, saying, Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay thee all.

27 Then the lord of that servant was moved with compassion, and loosed him, and forgave him the debt.

28 But the same servant went out, and found one of his fellow servants, which owed him a hundred pence: and he laid hands on him, and took him by the throat, saying, Pay me that thou owest.

29 And his fellow servant fell down at his feet, and besought him, saying, Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all.

30 And he would not: but went and cast him into prison, till he should pay the debt.

31 So when his fellow servants saw what was done, they were very sorry, and came and told unto their lord all that was done.

32 Then his lord, after that he had called him, said unto him, O thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all that debt, because thou desiredst me:

33 shouldest not thou also have had compassion on thy fellow servant, even as I had pity on thee?

34 And his lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him.

35 So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses.

Verse 21.

'Then' indicates that Peter's question comes up a short time after the previous teaching about forgiveness (verse 15). Peter is concerned about how many times he is obligated to forgive a brother who sins against him. Also that he is the one who must take the initiative to bring about a reconciliation. He asks if he can limit his responsibility to 7 times. But after that he could withhold his forgiveness.

Verse 22.

Jesus answers, beginning with Peter's seven, then multiplying

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it by 10, then another 7. He multiplies the two perfect Biblical numbers (10 and 7), then multiplies by another perfect 7. This clearly was not done to come up with another number limit. The message is that the spirit of forgiveness must have no limit, no calculated extent. Forgiveness must always be given.

Verse 23.

To illustrate the principle, Jesus relates a parable. He is going to show that in God's kingdom of grace through Christ, the principle of verse 22 must be practiced. In this particular, the forgiven person must also always be willing to show forgiveness to others.

The example: a king wished to settle accounts with his highest servants. Their duty was to collect the royal taxes from his various domains at prescribed times and delivers them to the royal treasury.

Verse 24.

When the king began to settle accounts (check the books), one of these men owed him 10,000 talents. The approximate value of a talent: a denar was one day's wage; 6 denars per week - it would take a laborer 1,000 weeks to earn 1 talent (6,000 denarii = 1 talent). The man owed 10,000 talents. This was so great an amount that it would be impossible to earn in a lifetime. Even if the man earned 100 times as much it would still be impossible. He might possibly get up to 1,000 talents, but he owed 10,000.

The other question: how could he have amassed such a large amount? Obviously, he had, in some way, squandered it all. It was the king's money. Now the servant must be dealt with.

Verses 25,26.

Since there was no humanly possible way for this man to repay, or even begin to earn this amount, the only recourse at the time was to sell him, his wife, and children as slaves - as well as all that he owned. This was not uncommon in the Near East at the time, as is mentioned several times in the Old Testament (II Kings 4:1). The king passes the sentence, but before it is carried out, the servant fell on his face at the king's feet, saying, "Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay thee all." He doesn't argue, deny, or make a thousand excuses. He had nothing, and no possibility to ever pay off the entire debt. He is in effect begging for mercy.

Verse 27.

The heart of that servant's master was moved with pity, and he let him go free and forgave him the debt. What mercy and compassion to forgive him was certainly unexpected, but showed the heart of the king.

Lesson XXXI Continued

Verse 28.

The story changes focus from the king's compassion to the cruel heart of the forgiven servant. This servant went out, and came upon one of his fellow servants who owed him 100 denarii (about 100 days' wages). He grabbed the man by the throat and began choking him, saying, pay whatever it is you owe. Notice he grabbed the man even before speaking. This servant reacted in a similar way to the first.

Verse 29.

The fellow-servant fell at his feet and was begging him, saying, Have patience with me and I will pay you. This should have dramatically reminded the first servant of his recent plea to the king. He had promised to pay everything, knowing that there was no real possibility. This man only promised to pay him, in effect, what he could. The first servant chooses not to treat this man as he had been treated.

Verse 30.

Instead of showing mercy, he had the man thrown in jail until he should pay what he owed. The small amount of debt legally only allowed this recourse. A larger debt would have allowed him to sell the man into slavery.

Verse 31.

This was done with other servants observing the whole thing. It moved them with sadness. They were obviously witnesses to the king's compassion on the first servant. So they went to the king and reported in detail exactly what had happened. Such a cruel injustice must be reported.

Verses 32,33.

The king summoned the culprit and said to him, "O thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all that debt, because thou desiredst me..." In the original, the word order begins with "all that debt", then the wicked servant. This emphasizes the size of the debt (2 million on today's dollars), along with the great generosity and pity of its forgiveness.

The obvious question: should he not also have had mercy on his fellow-servant as the king had mercy on him? Should he not have been continually grateful for this mercy? Did this not also obligated him to a similar manner of treating others? "Yes" can be the only correct answer.

Verse 34.

The king was supremely angry and handed him over to the 'torturers' until he should pay the entire debt. The word torturers occurs only here in the New Testament. They were court officials to

Lesson XXXI Continued

torture those found guilty of the most atrocious crimes. The entire debt was so great that this implies that he will never be able to pay. Thus his punishment will only end with his death.

Verse 35.

Jesus explains the spiritual truth of the parable. "So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses." This answered Peter's question. The truth lies in the heart. The forgiven sinner, in heartfelt gratitude, must always be ready to forgive anyone who does him injury, and cause a reconciliation.

Other principles include: our debt of sin is always greater than we can pay; Christ in love, mercy, and grace paid it all in full, having received such unmerited forgiveness, so we also must forgive in turn, without limit or measure. The unforgiving or unmerciful person will experience condemnation and everlasting punishment. If and when the question is asked, is the person who injures another, or the injured responsible to take the first step toward reconciliation? The Christian answer is: each person is responsible.

This ends Christ's Retirement (Galilean) Ministry

Matthew 19:1-12. Divorce.

1 And it came to pass, that when Jesus had finished these sayings, he departed from Galilee, and came into the coasts of Judea beyond Jordan;

2 and great multitudes followed him; and he healed them there.

3 ¶ The Pharisees also came unto him, tempting him, and saying unto him, Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause?

4 And he answered and said unto them, Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female,

5 and said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh?

6 Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.

7 They say unto him, Why did Moses then command to give a writing of divorcement, and to put her away?

8 He saith unto them, Moses because of the hardness of your hearts suffered you to put away your wives: but from the beginning it was not so.

9 And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery.

10 ¶ His disciples say unto him, If the case of the man be so with his wife, it is not good to marry.

11 But he said unto them, All men cannot receive this saying, save

Lesson XXXI Continued

they to whom it is given.

12 For there are some eunuchs, which were so born from their mother's womb: and there are some eunuchs, which were made eunuchs of men: and there be eunuchs, which have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake. He that is able to receive it, let him receive it.

Jesus departs Galilee and goes to the area across the Jordan from Judea, known as Perea. It has been suggested that the approximate time period was December 29 A.D. to April 30 A.D. The Gospel writers each select incidents they consider most important to record this time period. From here Jesus would re-cross the Jordan and travel to Jericho and on to Jerusalem (Chapter 20 and 21).

Verse 1.

Soon after Jesus completed the teachings of chapter 18, He traveled to the region east of Jordan.

Verse 2.

Great crowds followed him, and he healed them there. No longer avoiding the crowds, Jesus accepts the multitudes that come to Him and heals their sick.

Apparently, the news of this ministry of love and healing traveled far enough for a group of Pharisees to hear about it. Their response was not to just observe. Their hostility is obvious since they came to Jesus with a question of Law, hoping to tempt Him to make a mistake, to cause His popularity to decrease. They thought this question was so difficult and fraught with so many contradictions and details, that there was no way for Jesus to satisfy the varying opinions among religious leaders and the populace.

Verse 3.

The question: "Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause?" (Or, any cause whatsoever?) Moses had written that when a man takes a wife and marries her, if then she finds no favor in his eyes because he has found "improper behavior" in her, he may write her a bill of divorce. (Deuteronomy 24:1.) "Improper behavior" was a general enough statement to allow different interpretations.

Shammai and followers interpreted it as limited to infidelity or adultery. Another rabbi, Hillel interpreted it much more broadly, centering on the words 'finds no favor in his eyes.' In this line of thought, flimsy reasons were accepted as grounds for divorce. Two examples: 1.) if she served her husband slightly burned food. 2.) If she talked so loud at home that the neighbors could hear her.

If Jesus sided with either, the followers of the other side would be angered. The more liberal views of Hillel's followers were widely accepted. On the other side, the followers of Shammai demanded

Lesson XXXI Continued

moral strictness. Also, the women would have strong opinions for their own rights.

Jesus is going to answer: no, only for infidelity. But first He goes back to God's original plan for man and woman. It is backward to talk about how to get out of marriage.

Verses 4-6.

Jesus recounts the Genesis account of man and woman to become one flesh. He begins by questioning them as to whether they had not read Genesis 1:27 and 2:24. Man and woman were created for this union. Jesus viewed this as a divine ordinance. The conclusion: "What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder."

This does not require a marriage ceremony or certificate. It does show the seriousness and importance of marriage as a union.

Verse 7.

They countered with Moses' allowance for a divorce certificate (Deuteronomy 24:1-4).

Verse 8.

Jesus replies that it was because of hardness of heart. Moses had tried to discourage divorce. Because the people were unrelentingly stubborn that Moses felt constrained to make a concession, the certificate of divorcement. This did at least provide a way for the divorced wife to have some options.

Verse 9.

Jesus states the one exception to the binding Law of marriage: a man may divorce his wife on the sole ground of infidelity. If he divorces, but not on that ground, and then he marries another, he will be guilty of adultery. In this one case, the wife "put asunder" what God has joined together. They (the Pharisees) had appealed to Moses; now Jesus goes back to Moses in the original law God passed on to him. They have been straightened out in public and quietly withdrew. Apparently Jesus and His disciples also withdrew to a house where they seemed to also have some difficulty or confusion about the marriage issue. The lax ideas about the institution were so widely accepted and practiced in their environment that they were having trouble grasping the seriousness and spiritual aspects of the case.

Verse 10.

They posit the proposition that if the law of marriage is so strict, then it might be better not to marry. Their attitude, which seems to have been the common one at the time, that a man married to receive some benefit from the wife. The man mainly considered what he was going to get out of the marriage. If the first one didn't measure

Lesson XXXI Continued

up, then write a divorcement certificate and move on to the next best offer. If this is now not allowed, then where was a man's advantage?

This was, of course, the exact opposite attitude that both partners in a marriage should have. Marriage must include an unselfish love, a giving and self-sacrificing spirit.

Verse 11.

Jesus explains that not all men have room in their hearts or lives to properly fulfill the requirements of marriage. It is by the Grace of God that this is possible. Without this divine help, a blessed marriage is impossible. What the disciples have suggested, that there are circumstances where it would be better for a man not to marry, is also possible. Jesus is going to mention three circumstances where a special group is beneficial or necessary.

Verse 12.

The first group are born defective in the area of ability to procreate. The second are those physically castrated by other men. The third abstain from marriage by choice of dedication to the interest of the kingdom of heaven. This is an individual choice (I Corinthians 7:26) as was Paul's. No Scripture ascribes a higher degree of holiness to such a choice. On the contrary, throughout Scripture, the state of marriage is exalted (from Genesis 1:27 - I Timothy 5:14). It also embodies the love relationship between Christ and His Church (His bride). Peter took his wife along with him in his travels (I Corinthians 9:5).

Jesus closes this discussion with the words: "He that is able to receive it, let him receive it." He is suggesting to them that they must think this whole matter over, not just the principles as stated, but the true, deep and spiritual aspects that must be taken into account as they make their own choices.

Lesson XXXII

Matthew 19:13-15. Jesus and the Children.

13 ¶ Then were there brought unto him little children, that he should put his hands on them, and pray: and the disciples rebuked them.

14 But Jesus said, Suffer little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me; for of such is the kingdom of heaven.

15 And he laid his hands on them, and departed thence.

It can be assumed that the opening 'Then' refers to what took place after the preceding teaching about marriage while still in the house.

Without question, Jesus loved children. In this instance, Luke 18:15 identifies them as infants, brought for Jesus to bless in their parents' arms. There is no way of knowing how many there were, or if some were slightly older.

The disciples rebuked them. Meaning, those who brought the children. We can imagine some of them standing at the doorway and attempting to shoo them away. Their message: the Master doesn't have time to bother with little children. He has much more important matters to be concerned with (as also in 14:15,16).

Verse 14.

Jesus interrupts them saying: "Suffer little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me; for of such is the kingdom of heaven." Jesus accepts the attitude of the parents in coming to Him. He rebukes the disciples for trying to stop them.

The message, in principle, is that all blessings of salvation belong to those little children, and to such that come to Jesus in humble faith and trust belongs the kingdom of heaven.

Verse 15.

The laying on of hands was the first part of the prayer of blessing Jesus did upon each one in turn. Mark 10:16 mentions that He took them into His arms.

It must be recognized that the parents must have had faith in Jesus to bring their children to Him for blessing. I Corinthians 7:14 calls them "holy seed" and therefore members of His church. These children were not brought for healing, not sick or dying, but for blessing by more than a Healer or Physician. The belief is that little children or believers belong to Christ's church, then baptism, the sign of such membership, should be administered to them. As the children mature the parents must do all in their power to bring them to the point of individual acceptance of God's salvation through Jesus. This does not mean all will be saved, in the same way that the disciples included Judas. So some children in later years may reject Christ and perish.

Lesson XXXII Continued

Matthew 19:16-30. Peril of Riches.

- 16 ¶ And, behold, one came and said unto him, Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life?
- 17 And he said unto him, Why callest thou me good? there is none good but one, that is, God: but if thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments.
- 18 He saith unto him, Which? Jesus said, Thou shalt do no murder, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness,
- 19 Honor thy father and thy mother: and, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.
- 20 The young man saith unto him, All these things have I kept from my youth up: what lack I yet?
- 21 Jesus said unto him, If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me.
- 22 But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful: for he had great possessions.
- 23 ¶ Then said Jesus unto his disciples, Verily I say unto you, That a rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven.
- 24 And again I say unto you, It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.
- 25 When his disciples heard it, they were exceedingly amazed, saying, Who then can be saved?
- 26 But Jesus beheld them, and said unto them, With men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible.
- 27 Then answered Peter and said unto him, Behold, we have forsaken all, and followed thee; what shall we have therefore?
- 28 And Jesus said unto them, Verily I say unto you, That ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.
- 29 And every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive a hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life.
- 30 But many that are first shall be last; and the last shall be first.

There is no mention of time or place here. Obviously Jesus and the disciples had left the house where He had blessed the children and were journeying in Perea. Then, quite suddenly and surprisingly, a rich young ruler came up to Him with a most serious question (Mark 10:16,17). He was very eager to find the answer.

Addressing Christ as "teacher", he asks, "what good thing

Lesson XXXII Continued

shall I do that I may possess everlasting life?" Two things are noticed immediately. First, he is aware and disturbed by something lacking in his life in relation to God. Second, by his standard he thinks it must be some 'good work' that he must do to earn salvation.

Verse 17.

In answering, Jesus asks him why come to Him with this question, which is clearly written in the Holy Scriptures who fulfills the commandments of God is the only One who is good.

Verses 18,19.

The young man wants to know which ones. So Jesus quotes those of the second table. It has been suggested that a repeating of the first table was indispensable to the keeping of the second table. I John 4:20 - "He who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen."

Verse 20

He replied that he has observed all these things. Though he considers himself respectable and virtuous, he has no peace of mind or heart. He could only think it must be just one more thing he needs to do. At least he had sought out Jesus for the answer.

According to Mark 10:21, Jesus loved this young ruler kneeling in front of Him. He had worked hard at following the commandments, and he was inwardly struggling with his lack of peace. Jesus also saw that one thing firmly held him back - his wealth. Was he willing to love his neighbor as himself?

Verse 21.

The ultimate challenge: "If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me."

Verse 22.

"But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful: for he had great possessions."

What did he have to give up? He was important, even prominent, virtuous, of good reputation, reverent, and eager. But all these were tied to his great property and wealth. To give up the wealth would also take his prestige and position, his pride and reputation. He could not do so.

This was not to be understood as what God demands of all rich people. To all people blessed by wealth it is a test of their selfishness, or willingness to bless others.

Abraham was asked to give up his home and family and go to a strange place. He chose to believe God and completely trust in Him with his life and future. The rich young ruler was asked to give up

Lesson XXXII Continued

his wealth, but his faith was not in God, but in his wealth. His wealth ruled him instead of the opposite.

Verses 23,24.

A most solemn declaration: "That a rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven." To show how difficult it is, to the point of impossibility, Jesus describes trying to imagine a camel going through the eye of a needle. This would be easier. The point obviously that a rich man can neither influence, buy, work, or worm his way into salvation. Also, as the rich young ruler, the hold of wealth on a person's heart prevents them from seeing their sin, and need of a savior.

Verse 25.

The disciples were profoundly shocked, and asked, "Who then can be saved?" Since they had observed that all people were either rich, or wanted to be rich, who does that leave to be saved? The Heart of man seeks prosperity, and glories in it if successful. Everything revolves around works. The whole point is to turn their thinking to show that salvation was the gift of God, not of works, lest any man should boast.

Verse 26.

Jesus states it plainly, looking directly at them: "With men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible." Only by grace, only by the gift of faith, being born again from above.

Verse 27.

Peter was thinking back to what Jesus had told the rich young ruler, that if he gave up everything he would have treasure in heaven. He now wants to know, "Behold, we have forsaken all, and followed thee; what shall we have therefore?" They had done what Jesus asked the young man to do. Would they have treasure in Heaven?

Verse 28.

What a glorious answer! Another solemn declaration: in the restored universe, when Jesus will be seated on His throne of glory, the 12 who followed Him will also be seated on thrones, judging the 12 tribes of Israel. What a rich reward; they will be elevated to high positions of authority in Christ's kingdom; this is especially seen when contrasted with what they have given up.

Verse 29.

Putting Christ above all physical relatives and possessions gives benefits an hundredfold. "For my name's sake" is the same as "for my sake". "A hundredfold" means "many times over". (Luke 18:30.) Believers will appreciate, be thankful for, and enjoy and bless

Lesson XXXII Continued

others with whatever material blessings God provides. Also, giving up ungodly relatives, and bring new relatives into the family of God.

The closing words, "and shall inherit everlasting life." What blessings are bestowed on God's children in this life, they are only the foretaste of the full measure they will inherit in the eternal age to come.

Verse 30.

To sum it up, the contrast between what the world thinks and what God sees. Man looks on outward appearance - wealth, education, position, prestige. God looks upon the heart. This can also happen in the church. Many in important positions may not have earned the spiritual rewards of a quiet, humble person who prays and works to help others.

Matthew 20:1-16. Parable of the Laborers in the Vineyard.

1 For the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is a householder, which went out early in the morning to hire laborers into his vineyard.

2 And when he had agreed with the laborers for a penny a day, he sent them into his vineyard.

3 And he went out about the third hour, and saw others standing idle in the market place,

4 and said unto them; Go ye also into the vineyard, and whatsoever is right I will give you. And they went their way.

5 Again he went out about the sixth and ninth hour, and did likewise.

6 And about the eleventh hour he went out, and found others standing idle, and saith unto them, Why stand ye here all the day idle?

7 They say unto him, Because no man hath hired us. He saith unto them, Go ye also into the vineyard; and whatsoever is right, that shall ye receive.

8 So when even was come, the lord of the vineyard saith unto his steward, Call the laborers, and give them their hire, beginning from the last unto the first.

9 And when they came that were hired about the eleventh hour, they received every man a penny.

10 But when the first came, they supposed that they should have received more; and they likewise received every man a penny.

11 And when they had received it, they murmured against the goodman of the house,

12 saying, These last have wrought but one hour, and thou hast made them equal unto us, which have borne the burden and heat of the day.

13 But he answered one of them, and said, Friend, I do thee no wrong: didst not thou agree with me for a penny?

14 Take that thine is, and go thy way: I will give unto this last, even as unto thee.

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15 Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own? Is thine eye evil, because I am good?

16 So the last shall be first, and the first last: for many be called, but few chosen.

"For" indicates that what follows is at least one aspect of the previous saying to be illustrated by the following parable as to what will be unfolded on judgment day. This will be shown by the reward given the workers by the owner of the estate.

The owner represents God Who is sovereign over men's affairs. The kingdom of heaven or of God stresses the same thought. Salvation is His to give. That the owner himself goes out to hire the workmen shows his personal care for his vineyard. He goes out early in the morning.

Verse 2.

He hires a group to work for a denarius for the whole day. He sent them into his vineyard. There was a conversation and then agreement. The denar (or denarius) was the standard day-wage for laborers or soldiers. They agreed to the terms.

Verse 3.

The size of the vineyard meant that more workers were needed, so again about 9 A.M. he goes to where workers gathered (most likely the market place).

Verse 4.

Finding another group, he sends them into the vineyard. This time he tells them he will pay them whatever is right. They readily accept.

Verse 5.

They went. Then again, at noon and 3 P.M. he did the same. They also go - even only working part of the day.

Verse 7.

Then at 5 P.M., an our before quitting time, he goes again and finds more men standing around. He asks why they have been standing around, idle all day long, doing nothing. The reply is that no one had hired them. He was also concerned by their lack of work and he makes them an offer to work for one hour and they also go into the vineyard. They expected to be paid for one hour's work.

Verse 8.

Now, the first surprise in the (so far) obvious and logical story. The owner hired all he could find that needed work to get the most work done in his vineyard. The normal time to pay was the

Lesson XXXII Continued

evening, the end of the work day. But contrary to the norm, he requires that those that came last must be paid first. Then those next, going backwards, so that those hired first would be paid last. In this way, those hired first would be present as each later group was being paid. The ones hired last were given a denarius. When it came time for the first group, they logically assumed that they would be paid more since they had worked more than all the others. Then they were paid the same wage that they had agreed to. Obviously all the other groups are happily surprised to have been paid a full day's wage for whatever part of the day they had actually been working.

Verses 11,12.

Not fair, said the first group. Not only did they have to wait for all of the rest to be paid, but now they were paid the same as those who only worked for one hour. They were not satisfied with this kind of treatment. They express the inequity - they have worked hard even through the sweltering heat of the day. They grumble against the owner, who is present with them. What they are really upset about is his being way too generous to all those others, especially those that worked for only one hour. Why didn't he treat them generously in proportion to them?

They are going to be reprimanded for three things they are doing wrong. 1.) They had bargained with before they agreed to work - their concern for money being the most important value. The others agreed to work, trusting the owner to be fair. 2.) They think that they, as only hired day laborers, have the right to question the owner's decision. 3. They are envious of the others who had been treated generously.

Verse 15.

He explains it to one he addresses as 'Friend'. He has done him no injustice. Had they not agreed for one denarius for the day? That was the bargain. That's what he had done. He tells him to take his pay and go home. Now, he explains that since he is the boss, he makes the decisions. It is his money, and his is the right to do with it as he pleases. Or is this man only envious because he has chosen to be generous? The man has no right or recourse. He must just go on home.

Verse 16.

So the last shall be first, and the first last. The spiritual lesson: to do things for God, what you are going to get (especially materially - such as prosperity) should not be your first priority. Second, no one has the right to question God's sovereignty, to give according to His will as He pleases. Third, watch out for the destructive temptation of envy - which always includes the desire to have more, or be better than, or place oneself above others.

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Another thought - the gift of salvation is the same for all who accept it. This is true whether one is converted as a child and is a devout Christian worker their entire life, or an old person who accepts Christ a few moments before their death.

Lesson XXXIII

Matthew 20:17-19. Third Prediction of Passion and Resurrection.

17 ¶ And Jesus going up to Jerusalem took the twelve disciples apart in the way, and said unto them,
 18 Behold, we go up to Jerusalem; and the Son of man shall be betrayed unto the chief priests and unto the scribes, and they shall condemn him to death,
 19 and shall deliver him to the Gentiles to mock, and to scourge, and to crucify him: and the third day he shall rise again.

Verse 1.

The third and last prediction of His death and resurrection. The first was in 16:21, the second in 17:22. The first prediction included His suffering at the hands of the Jewish leaders. The second included His being delivered over to the Sanhedrin and condemned to death. Next, handed over to the Gentiles who would mock Him, scourge Him, and He would be crucified. "and the third day he shall rise again."

Jesus was breaking the news to the disciples in stages so as not to overwhelm them. As the events drew nearer, He revealed more details also, so that they would realize that by predicting the details, He not only foreknew what was to happen, but also chose to follow that path for their redemption.

This announcement took place on their way to Jerusalem, most likely through Jericho. Though there were many followers, Jesus took the 12 aside to impart this information to them privately.

Verses 18,19.

"Behold" gets their attention and lets them know that what is about to be said is very important. The chief priests and scribes, plus the elders, compose the Sanhedrin. A trial would take place; He would be condemned to death. Since the Jews were not allowed to carry out a death sentence, they would have to hand Jesus over to the Roman authorities, Pilate the governor, to get the death sentence carried out. The Romans would mock Him. The scourging would take place before the crucifixion. Then the positive climax of His resurrection. Mark 10:32 describes how puzzled, shocked, and in deep anxiety, the 12 were. They could not grasp what Jesus tells them. It is unthinkable, unreasonable, the worst thing that could ever happen.

Matthew 20:20-28. The Mother's Question.

20 ¶ Then came to him the mother of Zeb'edee's children with her sons, worshipping him, and desiring a certain thing of him.
 21 And he said unto her, What wilt thou? She saith unto him, Grant that these my two sons may sit, the one on thy right hand, and the

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other on the left, in thy kingdom.

22 But Jesus answered and said, Ye know not what ye ask. Are ye able to drink of the cup that I shall drink of, and to be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with? They say unto him, We are able.

23 And he saith unto them, Ye shall drink indeed of my cup, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with: but to sit on my right hand, and on my left, is not mine to give, but it shall be given to them for whom it is prepared of my Father.

24 And when the ten heard it, they were moved with indignation against the two brethren.

25 But Jesus called them unto him, and said, Ye know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them.

26 But it shall not be so among you: but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister;

27 and whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant:

28 even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.

Jesus had taught about how to be highly regarded and rewarded by God depended on faith, humility, and loving others as yourself. Yet James and John, Zebedee's sons, were still seeking their own interest in having the highest positions in God's kingdom, next to Christ. This also was in contrast to the example of Jesus Himself.

Verse 20.

"Then" indicates this took place fairly soon after the previous verses. It has been suggested that this mother was Salome, sister to Mary, mother of Jesus. She then was Jesus' aunt, her sons His cousins. That her two boys came with her shows that they agreed with her request. She comes and kneels before Jesus. She tells Him she has a favor to ask of Him. She respectfully waits for Him to inquire as to what it was she wanted. Her request shows her faith in Christ having a kingdom is strong, though there is no evidence of this happening any time soon. For her to ask at the time suggests that she accepted the common belief at that time that Messiah would defeat the Romans and re-establish the kingdom of Israel in triumph.

Whether her being His aunt was part of her boldness, we do not know. Since her sons were 2 of the 12, and even 2 of the closest circle of 3 (which included Peter) may have influenced her. It still was selfish, therefore sinful, to make such a request. Also, it was a misunderstanding of what Jesus had taught about who would be greatest in the kingdom of heaven (and not of earth).

Verse 22.

Jesus speaks directly to James and John explaining that they do not really understand what they were asking for themselves. They

Lesson XXXIII Continued

do not perceive that the believer's way to glory was through suffering, the way of the cross. The Old Testament idiom of "drinking a cup" refers to experience some activity to the fullest degree, as if drinking the contents of a cup completely. Their reply that they were able seems far too bold. Though loyal to Jesus, future events will show that they were not ready at all.

Verse 23.

Jesus tells them that they will drink His cup, predicting the martyrdom of James (Acts 12:2); John, banished to the island of Patmos (Revelation 1:9). But the positions to His right and left are only according to God's eternal decree. They cannot be changed even by Jesus Himself.

Verse 24.

When the other 10 Apostles heard of this request, they were understandably upset with the two brothers. They were asking to be more important in position and authority than them. That they became upset also indicates that they had not taken to heart the lessons Jesus had been teaching them about humility and serving God by serving others, not lording it over them. They were condemning in the two what they also valued.

Verse 25.

Rather than admonish them for their purely worldly attitudes and their lack of understanding the spiritual values He has been trying to teach them, He gently and kindly explains what the real difference should be. First, He describes the normal earthly struggle to reach the top by whatever means necessary, and then when they reach the top, they wield their power over others in unkind and often cruel ways. They become tyrants and oppressors.

Verses 26,27.

Jesus then describes what it should be like among the 12. To be great in God's eyes, they must become as a servant of the others. To be first they must attempt to be a humble attendant. Greatness is measured by giving, not getting. This is the law of love. This is only possible for the child of God, trusting in God's love as expressed in redemption through Christ. Only such a person is free from the bondage of a sinful nature to be free to love and give.

Verse 28.

Jesus Himself, as the Son of Man, did not come to be served, but to serve and give His life a ransom for many.

As Son of Man, He fulfills the prophecy of Daniel 7:14. From before creation He was the Son of God. He lowers Himself from on high and is born of a woman. But not to be worshipped, instead to serve,

Lesson XXXIII Continued

love, and give His life as a substitution sacrifice, a ransom for all those who would accept it (see I Peter 1:18). These are the chosen ones of God, who are given the faith to believe. They are redeemed by Christ, then sealed and guided by the Holy Spirit. The three Persons of the Godhead in perfect agreement and harmony in the plan and completion of that plan, both from before the beginning unto all eternity. This also stresses the fact of Christ choosing this path, humbling Himself and willingly giving up His life for others.

Matthew 20:29-34. Two Blind Men at Jericho (also Mark 10:46-52).

29 ¶ And as they departed from Jericho, a great multitude followed him.

30 And, behold, two blind men sitting by the wayside, when they heard that Jesus passed by, cried out, saying, Have mercy on us, O Lord, thou Son of David.

31 And the multitude rebuked them, because they should hold their peace: but they cried the more, saying, Have mercy on us, O Lord, thou Son of David.

32 And Jesus stood still, and called them, and said, What will ye that I shall do unto you?

33 They say unto him, Lord, that our eyes may be opened.

34 So Jesus had compassion on them, and touched their eyes: and immediately their eyes received sight, and they followed him.

Jericho was located about 15 miles northeast of Jerusalem and about 3,300 feet lower in elevation. The city had been improved by Herod the Great, with an amphitheater, villas, baths, palm trees, rose gardens, etc.

Jesus is on His way to Jerusalem via Jericho. There is no explanation as to why Mark only mentions Bartimaeus while Matthew mentions two blind men healed. There is also disagreement as to whether this happened when Jesus was leaving Jericho (Matthew, Mark), or entering Jericho (Luke). A solution is possible but the necessary details were not recorded.

As Passover approached, a large crowd was traveling, also from Perea, and following Jesus. Having passed through the city, they traveled along the road where two blind men were sitting on the wayside. When they learned that Jesus was passing by, they began calling out to Him. Whether they overheard someone mentioning Jesus' Name, or asked someone in the crowd is not recorded. The important thing was that once they found out, they called, "Have mercy on us, O Lord, thou Son of David." As mentioned previously (9:27-31), Son of David was a recognized name of Messiah.

To be blind meant a life of begging by the roadside. They were desperate for mercy, a way out of depending on the pity of

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passers-by.

Verse 31.

The crowd warned them to be quiet. They did not want their journey to be interrupted, especially by these two blind beggars. They were of no importance at all. These men knew that their only hope was in the mercy of Jesus Who they recognized as the Messiah by calling Him Son of David. So, they shouted all the louder, so that their chance would not pass by because of their timidity.

Verses 32-34.

Having heard them, Jesus stopped and called them to come to Him. Once they had been guided to Him, He asked what they wanted Him to do for them. They wanted their eyes to be opened - to see.

As always, Jesus was moved with compassion. Their affliction was removed as He touched their eyes. Their sight regained, they followed Him. Now their faith in Jesus was rewarded physically and also spiritually. They joined the crowd onward to Jerusalem and the Passover.

Matthew 21:1-11. The Triumphal Entry.

1 And when they drew nigh unto Jerusalem, and were come to Bethphage, unto the mount of Olives, then sent Jesus two disciples,
2 saying unto them, Go into the village over against you, and straightway ye shall find an ass tied, and a colt with her: loose them, and bring them unto me.
3 And if any man say aught unto you, ye shall say, The Lord hath need of them; and straightway he will send them.
4 All this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying,
5 Tell ye the daughter of Zion, Behold, thy King cometh unto thee, meek, and sitting upon an ass, and a colt the foal of an ass.
6 And the disciples went, and did as Jesus commanded them,
7 and brought the ass, and the colt, and put on them their clothes, and they set him thereon.
8 And a very great multitude spread their garments in the way; others cut down branches from the trees, and strewed them in the way.
9 And the multitudes that went before, and that followed, cried, saying, Hosanna to the Son of David:
Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest.
10 And when he was come into Jerusalem, all the city was moved, saying, Who is this?
11 And the multitude said, This is Jesus the prophet of Nazareth of Galilee.

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The Passion Week begins here. It can be assumed that Jesus and His disciples arrived at Bethany before sunset on Friday. On the Sabbath (sunset on Friday until sunset on Saturday), they visited the home of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus. On Saturday evening, a supper was given in Jesus' honor. The following day, Sunday, was the time of the Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem.

This was a very significant event for the following reasons: first, this will be a public demonstration of the masses' belief in His Messiahship, which will further enrage the religious leaders to pursue their plot to get rid of Him. They wanted to wait until after the Passover to carry it out, but they would be forced to follow the Father's time table. This event was also to fulfill the Messianic prophecy of Zechariah 9:9 - the people call out to Him as the Son of David. The mode of His entry was one of humility and peace, not as a military conqueror or national leader. Later, even the crowds would turn on Jesus, and agree to His crucifixion with their shouting - "Crucify, crucify!"

Verses 1,2.

Bethany was located on the eastern slope of the Mount of Olives, about two miles east of Jerusalem. They were coming near Bethphage (house of unique figs). The exact location is not known. The disciples were informed that when they first entered the town, they would find a donkey and its colt tied up. If this was prearranged or by divine knowledge is not recorded.

Verse 3.

If anyone says anything to them, they are to say that the Lord needs them, they will let them go. Jesus identifies Himself as "The Lord", not as just their lord. The owners would acknowledge His claim as believers in Him.

Verses 4,5.

This fulfilled that which was spoken through the prophet: "Say to the daughter of Zion, Look your King is coming to you, meek and mounted on a donkey, even upon a colt, the foal of a donkey." The daughter of Zion is Jerusalem, Israel.

This king is not as other kings, but has come only to benefit the people. He is meek and gracious. He is mounted upon a lowly animal, not a war horse. As king, He is not the national rescuer of the nation, but He Who rides to His sacrificial death for the salvation of individual people, not the nation politically.

Verses 6,7.

They followed His instructions and everything happened as Jesus had told them. They brought the animals - the donkey and its colt. The owners had questioned them, and accepted that "the Lord"

Lesson XXXIII Continued

needed them. When they brought them back, they laid their outer garments upon them. Jesus takes His seat upon the colt and begins His ride. (Luke 19:31.) What happens to the mother is not mentioned.

Verse 8.

Many in the crowd of Passover pilgrims also took their outer garments and spread them on the road to soften the path. Others cut branches from the nearby palm trees and spread them on the road for the same reason. This was an act of honor towards the King as had been done in Israel's past (II Kings 9:13).

Verse 9.

Then the crowds began to shout, those in front as well as those that followed: "Hosanna to the Son of David: Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest."

Hosanna means "save now" or "save, we pray". One crowd came from Bethany following Jesus, the other was a group that came out from Jerusalem as Jesus approached and then went before Him lifting their voices in praise and supplication of the One coming in the Name of the Lord (Psalms 118:26). The Messiah was regarded as a gift from God (Psalms 148:1,2).

Verses 10,11.

As Jesus came into Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred up, saying, "Who is this?" The uproar brought those who followed Jesus to answer that He was the prophet Jesus from Nazareth of Galilee. He was not only the prophet, but also was fulfilling prophecy. He was God's message and messenger to the people.

Lesson XXXIV

Matthew 21:12-17. Cleansing the Temple.

12 ¶ And Jesus went into the temple of God, and cast out all them that sold and bought in the temple, and overthrew the tables of the money changers, and the seats of them that sold doves,
13 and said unto them, It is written, My house shall be called the house of prayer; but ye have made it a den of thieves.
14 ¶ And the blind and the lame came to him in the temple; and he healed them.
15 And when the chief priests and scribes saw the wonderful things that he did, and the children crying in the temple, and saying, Hosanna to the Son of David; they were sore displeased,
16 and said unto him, Hearest thou what these say? And Jesus saith unto them, Yea; have ye never read, Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings thou hast perfected praise?
17 And he left them, and went out of the city into Bethany; and he lodged there.

Verse 12.

Jesus spent Sunday night at Bethany (Mark 11:11). On Monday, the story continues when Jesus entered the Temple, the Court of the Gentiles. As it had been in the early part of His ministry, so it was again like a marketplace. Business was busy and profit was exacted from the buyers. Sheep and oxen were being sold to the large number of pilgrims who had come to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover at the Temple. The merchants richly paid the priests for the privilege of selling "approved" sacrificial animals. If a pilgrim brought their own, they ran the risk of their animals being rejected by these same priests.

The noise of business, the animals and their excrement all were gross, sinful desecration of what was dedicated to God and holy. Money changers sat at tables changing foreign currency for the Jewish coins that only were accepted in the Temple for offerings. Pigeons and doves were also available for those too poor to buy a lamb. They were grossly over charged - for example, being charged the equivalent of \$4 for two doves otherwise worth 5 cents.

All of this was wrong because of the cheating of the people, but that this was taking place within the Temple of God was unthinkable. Jesus drove them all out, turning over the tables of the money changers and the seats of those selling doves. He expressed indignation as Lord of the Temple and God's representative.

Verse 13.

He spoke out by quoting Scripture, saying, "It is written, My house shall be called the house of prayer..." He then accused them of the crime of turning it into a robbers' den. This was the place of communion with God, quiet devotion, sacrifice, and contemplation of

Lesson XXXIV Continued

spiritual truth.

Jesus quotes Jeremiah 7:11, where the prophet describes the Jews of his day who were greatly involved with all manner of gross sins, yet were still following the outward forms of worship. They thought this would somehow prevent God's wrath from coming upon them. Jesus sees the same thing happening before His eyes: "Has this house that is called by My name, become a den of robbers in your eyes?"

That the temple police made no move to stop Jesus shows that His popularity with the crowds (seen in the Triumphal Entry) made them afraid to interfere. And their bosses, the priests, did not want a riot or any kind of uproar. They would seek to arrest Him in secret.

Verse 14.

The blind and the lame came to Him in the Temple and He healed them. As always, He turned away no one who was in need, even after the chaos of the expulsion of the merchants. His compassion always brought mercy and healing.

Verse 15,16.

When the chief priests and the scribes saw these wondrous works, and the children in the Temple shouting "Hosanna to the Son of David", they became angry and questioned Jesus if He heard what they were saying, as if they should hush, because they were doing something wrong? They obviously didn't want anyone praising Jesus, and also certainly not recognizing Him as the Promised Messiah. Only they had the right and authority to make such decisions and they were not about to recognize anyone as greater than themselves. That He had also stopped the business that made them wealthy was certainly part of their anger also. They want Jesus to hush the children, but this would be wrong from God's point of view. Jesus replies, "Yes", meaning that He heard the children, but no, the children were doing a good thing. He proceeds to quote Psalms 8:2: "Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings thou hast perfected praise?" He asks if they have not read this Scripture. Thus God is using the shouts of these children for His own glory, that they speak the truth in calling Jesus the Son of David.

Verse 17.

After this He left them and went out of the city, to Bethany, and spent the night there. Exactly where was not important, so not mentioned.

Matthew 21:18-22. Cursing the Fig Tree.

18 ¶ Now in the morning, as he returned into the city, he hungered.
19 And when he saw a fig tree in the way, he came to it, and found

Lesson XXXIV Continued

nothing thereon, but leaves only, and said unto it, Let no fruit grow on thee henceforward for ever. And presently the fig tree withered away.

20 And when the disciples saw it, they marveled, saying, How soon is the fig tree withered away!

21 Jesus answered and said unto them, Verily I say unto you, If ye have faith, and doubt not, ye shall not only do this which is done to the fig tree, but also if ye shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; it shall be done.

22 And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive.

Verse 18.

Mark records this event as happening on two successive days (Monday and Tuesday). Matthew records it as a topical unit (verses 18-20). Without introduction, as Jesus was returning to the city, He was hungry (showing His human nature).

The fig was the first fruit tree mentioned in the Bible. It was also common in Israel. The early figs from the sprouts of the previous year began to appear in April and are ripe from May to June. The later, also larger, fruit on the new shoots are ripe from August to October. Usually the early figs appeared at the same time as the leaves!

The time of Passover was April. It was not yet time for figs to be ripe. Being hungry, Jesus notices this particular tree by the roadside from a distance in full foliage. It was therefore possible it might have some early fruit. Jesus went up to it and found no fruit. He said to it, "Let no fruit grow on thee henceforward for ever." The fig tree withered at once.

Jesus was to use this event as the symbol of the nation of Israel - a showy but fruitless nation. They observed the religious ceremonies but there was no heartfelt spiritual worship taking place. This was also seen in the market place in the Temple and the chief priests and Pharisees seeking the death of the Son of God. The nation that bore no fruit would also be cursed and destroyed for their rejection of God's Messiah.

Verse 20.

What Mark recorded as happening the following day (Mark 11:20), Matthew relates as the reaction of the disciples to the tree withering overnight. They were astonished and questioned how this was possible.

Verses 21,22.

Jesus used this to teach a deeper spiritual lesson. He solemnly declares that having faith with no doubt, one could do the same to a fig tree. And beyond that, a mountain may be lifted up and

Lesson XXXIV Continued

thrown into the sea. Whatever is asked for in prayer, believing, one shall receive.

The mountain indicated was the Mount of Olives; the sea, the Dead Sea, a distance of 4,000 feet down. Again, a symbolic figure. In God's will there would be nothing gained by such a feat. But in the realm of moving the hearts of men to be converted to faith in Christ as recorded in the Book of Acts in the thousands, could certainly be described as moving mountains by prayer and faith. With man it would be impossible, but with God it was and is possible.

Matthew 21:23-27. Authority Questioned.

23 ¶ And when he was come into the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came unto him as he was teaching, and said, By what authority doest thou these things? and who gave thee this authority?

24 And Jesus answered and said unto them, I also will ask you one thing, which if ye tell me, I in like wise will tell you by what authority I do these things.

25 The baptism of John, whence was it? from heaven, or of men? And they reasoned with themselves, saying, If we shall say, From heaven; he will say unto us, Why did ye not then believe him?

26 But if we shall say, Of men; we fear the people; for all hold John as a prophet.

27 And they answered Jesus, and said, We cannot tell. And he said unto them, Neither tell I you by what authority I do these things.

It is assumed that Jesus was teaching in one of the large and beautiful porticos of the Temple. They were around the inside of the Temple walls, bordering the Court of the Gentiles within. While He was teaching, a group consisting of the chief priests and elders came up to Him with a question. They wanted to know who gave Him the right to do the things He had been doing. This included His healing, teaching, and cleansing of the Temple. Obviously they had not. Neither had the Sanhedrin.

He had not been educated in the Temple by the leading scribes, no formal and accredited training. They thought if He admitted that He had no credentials, the people would lose respect for Him. If He claimed that He had authority from God, He could be accused of blasphemy by usurping authority that only belonged to God. They are yet too timid to accuse or arrest Him more directly.

Verses 24,25.

Jesus recognized their trickery. He told them that He would answer their question if they answered His first. He would tell them by what authority He did these things. But first, the baptism of John

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- did it come from heaven or from men? This was exactly the point they had raised. If they correctly answered from God, then that would have included the authority of Jesus being also from God, for John identified Jesus as greater than he, the Lamb of God Who came to take away the sins of the world. (John 1:29.)

Verses 26,27.

If they admitted 'from heaven', then the obvious question: "Why didn't they believe him?" If they answered 'from men', then the general public, and especially the religious pilgrims who had come for Passover, might cause a riot against them. The people considered John a prophet from God. These leaders couldn't risk it. But they were not honest. They didn't say they refused to answer, but side-stepped the whole issue by claiming they didn't know the answer. Jesus exposed their dishonesty by refusing to answer their question as well.

Matthew 21:28-32. Two Sons.

28 ¶ But what think ye? A certain man had two sons; and he came to the first, and said, Son, go work today in my vineyard.

29 He answered and said, I will not; but afterward he repented, and went.

30 And he came to the second, and said likewise. And he answered and said, I go, sir; and went not.

31 Whether of them twain did the will of his father? They say unto him, The first. Jesus saith unto them, Verily I say unto you, That the publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you.

32 For John came unto you in the way of righteousness, and ye believed him not; but the publicans and the harlots believed him: and ye, when ye had seen it, repented not afterward, that ye might believe him.

Jesus now tells a parable to further illustrate what has just taken place in regard to the Jewish leaders' attitude toward the Baptist.

Verses 28-30.

Jesus asks the crowd to think about the following situation. The father of two sons asks the first to go and work in the family vineyard today. He said, "I will not." A more modern reply might be, "I don't feel like it." Both mean a refusal. For whatever reason, he later repented and did go to work. The father goes to the second son with the same request. He receives the opposite response. The second son says, "I will, sir." But he did not go.

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Verses 31,32.

Now the point: which of the two sons did what the father wanted? Jesus was talking directly to the priests and elders who had earlier questioned Him. They had only one possible answer (unless they refused) and so they answered, "The first."

Jesus opens with a solemn declaration that what He is about to say is certain spiritual truth. Tax collectors and prostitutes are getting into the kingdom of God ahead of them. These publicans were despised by the Jews and especially their leaders, as traitors. They were placed in the same class as sinners of gross immorality, the women of ill repute. Their lives showed that they had rejected the call of God - in effect like the first son, saying he would not go. But then John the Baptist had come preaching repentance and righteousness. The tax collectors and prostitutes believed him and repented. The righteousness they saw in the Baptist and the words he preached opened their hearts to repentance and belief. This must have happened in enough numbers for Jesus to make this generalization.

On the other hand, these religious leaders showed by their speech and outward manners that they professed that they would do whatever God required. It was as if they were in a constant business of acting or making preparations to go, but never actually going. Jesus' verdict: "They say, but do not." They had rejected the Baptist. They had done so in spite of the public conversion of so many publicans and prostitutes. Their hearts refused to change. And now they were rejecting the greater One in front of them, and plotting a way to get rid of Him. Doing the will of God was not any part of their thinking or motives. Jesus was doing the will of His Father. The will of God for men is to accept His Son as Savior and Lord. These sons of Israel refused to do this one thing needful to enter the kingdom of Heaven.

Matthew 21:33-46. Parable of the Wicked Husbandmen.

33 ¶ Hear another parable: There was a certain householder, which planted a vineyard, and hedged it round about, and digged a winepress in it, and built a tower, and let it out to husbandmen, and went into a far country:

34 and when the time of the fruit drew near, he sent his servants to the husbandmen, that they might receive the fruits of it.

35 And the husbandmen took his servants, and beat one, and killed another, and stoned another.

36 Again, he sent other servants more than the first: and they did unto them likewise.

37 But last of all he sent unto them his son, saying, They will reverence my son.

38 But when the husbandmen saw the son, they said among themselves, This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and let us seize on his inheritance.

39 And they caught him, and cast him out of the vineyard, and slew him. 40 When the lord therefore of the vineyard cometh, what will he do unto those husbandmen?

Lesson XXXIV Continued

41 They say unto him, He will miserably destroy those wicked men, and will let out his vineyard unto other husbandmen, which shall render him the fruits in their seasons.

42 ¶ Jesus saith unto them, Did ye never read in the Scriptures, The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner: this is the Lord's doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes?

43 Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof.

44 And whosoever shall fall on this stone shall be broken: but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder.

45 ¶ And when the chief priests and Pharisees had heard his parables, they perceived that he spake of them.

46 But when they sought to lay hands on him, they feared the multitude, because they took him for a prophet.

This parable stresses the rejection and killing of God's beloved Son by the entire Jewish nation.

The owner of an estate set aside a part of it for a vineyard. He prepared every necessary part; ground prepared, vines planted, a fence around it, a watchtower to guard it, a winepress to process the grapes. He then leased it to tenants who would do the work and set aside a percentage of the vintage to pay for the use of his property. Once the terms were agreed upon, He went abroad.

Verse 34.

When the time of harvest was near, the owner sent his servants to collect his share of the fruit from the share-croppers. They made the request in his name.

Verses 35,36.

These tenants did not honor their just request, but shamefully killed one, beat up and otherwise mistreated those first sent, and also a second, larger group. This was dishonest, illegal, cruel, and wicked. Though all these things were worthy of harsh punishment, the owner decided to give them one more chance to do right. However, it must be recognized that no normal owner would suffer such treatment for this much time, and violent treatment of his men. Jesus was describing the longsuffering patience and love for even these violent, wicked sinners that only God is capable of.

Verses 37-39.

The owner's final response. Apparently he had no more men to send. His servants were either killed or badly beaten, thus not able to return (if they even made it back to where he was). The only one left to send was his only beloved son, who the owner thought they would naturally respect. They should be too ashamed to hurt him.

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Yet when these wicked tenants saw the son, they started talking about what they could do to him. They have no shame or remorse, but only their own selfish ends. They reasoned according to their shallow thinking. Him being the only heir to the vineyard, if they killed him, there would be no one else to come collecting. Therefore, they would control - and essentially own - the vineyard. They disregard the fact that the owner is still there, though far away. So they agree to the deed. They take him out of the vineyard and kill him.

Verses 40,41.

All has lead up to this. What will the owner of the vineyard do to these share-croppers? It was the common practice of the time that teachers asked questions of the audience, as well as rabbis of their students. This was to hold attention and interest, and bring involvement.

The response from the audience was clear: the owner will bring a dreadful end to these scoundrels. Then the owner will lease the vineyard to other share-croppers, who will do right by giving him his due share. The answer was clear, correct, just, and reasonable. Yet, those that gave it had no idea that Jesus was about to explain to them that, indeed, the wicked share-croppers in this parable represented them, and the vineyard represented Israel, and the owner represented God, and the son was Jesus.

Verses 42,43.

Jesus proceeds to drive the point of the parable home. He begins by suggesting that with all their bragging about their knowledge of the Scriptures, have they never read Psalms 118:22,23? He then quotes the passage. It describes a situation of rejection of a stone, which became the cornerstone, the most important stone in the building. It was done by the Lord. The parable described the wicked tenants as rejecting the owner's son, even killing Him. Rather than inheriting the vineyard, it would be taken away from them. These chief priests, scribes, and other leaders, along with their followers, as well as the nation would be destroyed, and the Gospel given to the Gentiles.

Jesus tells them directly: the kingdom of God shall be taken away from you and shall be given to a nation that will produce its fruit.

Verse 44.

Jesus goes back to the cornerstone metaphor to describe the force of this stone. Anyone who attempts to stand in the way of the building of His church will be dashed to pieces. Also to reject this cornerstone of the church, which is to reject Christ, means that person will face Christ's judgment unto damnation and punishment eternal.

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Verse 45.

Now the chief priests and Pharisees realized that the parable was directed at them - that they were being portrayed as the wicked tenants. They had rejected Jesus and were indeed plotting His death. In verse 43, Jesus made it impossible for them to disclaim His intention. He made it clear how their selfish motives would bring dire consequences upon them and the whole nation. To realize the spiritual implications and then choose to continue their path to destruction only shows the closed minded, prideful, and wicked hardness of their hearts.

Verse 46.

Rather than learn from the lesson, they wanted to arrest Him. But they remembered His present acclaim and general popularity among the great numbers of people, especially the pilgrims from Galilee and those that witnessed the raising of Lazarus. The general populace considered Him, at the very least, as a true prophet from God. These volatile crowds could quickly become agitated and cause a riot. That was the last thing these men wanted. That would cause their leadership to be rejected with possible violence against them. This would very likely bring Roman soldiers. The soldiers would quell what could be interpreted as an uprising with disastrous results for the religious leaders and the nation. What they wanted to do must be carefully planned, and carried out quietly.

Lesson XXXV

Matthew 22:1-14. Parable of the Marriage Feast.

1 And Jesus answered and spake unto them again by parables, and said,
2 The kingdom of heaven is like unto a certain king, which made a marriage for his son,
3 and sent forth his servants to call them that were bidden to the wedding: and they would not come.
4 Again, he sent forth other servants, saying, Tell them which are bidden, Behold, I have prepared my dinner: my oxen and my fatlings are killed, and all things are ready: come unto the marriage.
5 But they made light of it, and went their ways, one to his farm, another to his merchandise:
6 and the remnant took his servants, and entreated them spitefully, and slew them.
7 But when the king heard thereof, he was wroth: and he sent forth his armies, and destroyed those murderers, and burned up their city.
8 Then saith he to his servants, The wedding is ready, but they which were bidden were not worthy.
9 Go ye therefore into the highways, and as many as ye shall find, bid to the marriage.
10 So those servants went out into the highways, and gathered together all as many as they found, both bad and good: and the wedding was furnished with guests.
11 ¶ And when the king came in to see the guests, he saw there a man which had not on a wedding garment:
12 and he saith unto him, Friend, how camest thou in hither not having a wedding garment? And he was speechless.
13 Then said the king to the servants, Bind him hand and foot, and take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.
14 For many are called, but few are chosen.

This parable is found only in Matthew. The last in the series of three (The Two Sons, The Wicked Tenants), this parable emphasizes the utter destruction of the invited guests and their city by fire. Then the outsiders (Gentiles) will be brought in, with one exception: the guest without proper wedding robe.

Verse 1.

That Jesus 'responded' suggests that He is trying to show these Jewish leaders the true nature and consequences of their rejection of God's messengers. He is doing so by using figurative stories: 'parables'.

Verse 2.

The kingdom of heaven is described as what will happen in the final phase of the Messiah's kingdom: the king is giving a marriage

Lesson XXXV Continued

feast for his son. This only hints at a reference to the Marriage Supper of the Lamb because that is not the emphasis here. The emphasis is on the guests. The importance of the feast was that it was being given by the king, and for his son. The invited guests were his subjects.

Verses 3,4.

The king is portrayed as very patient with them. They had all been informed well beforehand. Now he sends out his servants to summon them, that the time had come. They were not ready or willing to stop what they were doing. They refused. The king sent more servants to explain that every preparation had been made - everything was ready. There were generous amounts of food - the best available. This was the third invitation.

It has been suggested that the first call was the calling out directly by God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, then to Moses and the people of Israel.

As in the Wicked Tenants' parable, the servants represented the many prophets God sent to call His people to faith and obedience to Him. This was the second call.

The people of Israel under Moses generally rejected God's call. The first group of servants were ignored: the prophets of the Old Testament.

Then the third call: that all was ready, by the second group of servants. This suggests John the Baptist, Jesus Himself, His disciples.

The focus of this parable is on the great patience of the king and the responses of the now thrice invited guests.

Verses 5,6.

Two reactions are pictured: first, indifference to what was offered - a focus on personal, material things: one to his farm, another to his business. There was no perception of or interest in the king's offer of great blessing. Second, another group was violently hostile, treating the messengers shamefully, killing some of them. This still describes the reactions of most people to the offering of the Gospel of Christ.

Verse 7.

The king's patience has reached its end. His anger was burning. He sent his troops; they destroyed those murderers and set their city on fire. These guests had their own city. It represented Jerusalem. This was then the prediction of the slaughter of thousands and the destruction of the city by the Roman Army in 70 A.D. The estimate is that more than a million Jews were killed. The Temple and the city was burned to the ground. The nation ceased to exist, its remaining inhabitants dispersed among the Gentile nations.

Lesson XXXV Continued

Verses 8-10.

Now, the king turns his attention to filling the wedding hall. The wedding is ready. The invited ones did not deserve the honor. He gave directions to his servants to go to the country crossroads, and as many people as can be found, invite to come to the wedding. They obeyed and gathered all they found, good and bad alike. The wedding hall was filled with guests. This describes the rejection of Jesus by the Jews in general. Then other people in great numbers (Jews as well as Gentiles) are offered the Gospel and accept the invitation. What they had been before was not the criteria of inclusion. Salvation was and is offered to everyone. This could have been the end of the parable, but there was one exception that had to be included. This was completely from God's point of view.

Verse 11.

The king, when viewing the guests, noticed a man not wearing the required wedding robe. The necessary inference is that the king, from his generosity, gave a wedding robe to each of his guests. This would make them all equal in value and appearance. It can also be assumed that many could not have provided their own. This is also similar to the description of the fine linen given to the saints to wear at the wedding of the Lamb (Revelation 19:7,8; Isaiah 61:10). The one exception: this man chose to keep on his own robe. This indicates defiance of the king's offer and self-satisfaction, even self-righteousness.

Verses 12,13.

The king naturally confronted the man. In a polite way, calling him 'Friend', and asking him how he got in without a wedding robe! The man is given a chance to reply. That he is speechless can only mean that he had no good reason, no excuse for his action. The king orders him bound hand and foot and cast into the most distant darkness. This was the furthest contrast to the brilliant light of the wedding hall. Then the phrase: there shall be weeping and gnashing (grinding) of teeth. An expression of utter anguish and hopelessness.

Verse 14.

The spiritual lesson. Many are called, but few are chosen. The Gospel has been preached to untold numbers of people since the time of Christ's ministry. Most choose not to accept the offer, as the man previously described, as well as the first invited guests, the Wicked Tenants and the Second Son. Compared to that number, the ones saved are few. These few are chosen from eternity to inherit everlasting life. Salvation is not a human accomplishment, but the gift of God (Luke 12:32; John 6:39; Ephesians 1:4).

In this sense, righteousness is imputed to each saved sinner,

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and righteousness is also imparted to each (the power of God unto good works). This is pictured in the white robe given to each guest in the parable.

It is the gift of God, a covering of the sinner, and the motivation and ability to act accordingly.

The main point remains: accept God's call to His Son, Christ Jesus. This brings blessing unimaginable both here and forevermore, in the presence of God, Jesus and the other saints in glory.

Matthew 22:15-33. Questions to Capture Jesus.

15 ¶ Then went the Pharisees, and took counsel how they might entangle him in his talk.

16 And they sent out unto him their disciples with the Hero'di-ans, saying, Master, we know that thou art true, and teachest the way of God in truth, neither carest thou for any man: for thou regardest not the person of men.

17 Tell us therefore, What thinkest thou? Is it lawful to give tribute unto Caesar, or not?

18 But Jesus perceived their wickedness, and said, Why tempt ye me, ye hypocrites?

19 Show me the tribute money. And they brought unto him a penny.

20 And he saith unto them, Whose is this image and superscription?

21 They say unto him, Caesar's. Then saith he unto them, Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's.

22 When they had heard these words, they marveled, and left him, and went their way.

23 ¶ The same day came to him the Sadducees, which say that there is no resurrection, Acts 23.8 and asked him,

24 saying, Master, Moses said, If a man die, having no children, his brother shall marry his wife, and raise up seed unto his brother.

25 Now there were with us seven brethren: and the first, when he had married a wife, deceased, and, having no issue, left his wife unto his brother:

26 likewise the second also, and the third, unto the seventh.

27 And last of all the woman died also.

28 Therefore in the resurrection, whose wife shall she be of the seven? for they all had her.

29 ¶ Jesus answered and said unto them, Ye do err, not knowing the Scriptures, nor the power of God.

30 For in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven.

31 But as touching the resurrection of the dead, have ye not read that which was spoken unto you by God, saying,

32 I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? God is not the God of the dead, but of the living.

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33 And when the multitude heard this, they were astonished at his doctrine.

Verse 15.

Earlier on this same day Jesus had described the Jewish leaders, in parables, as enemies of God, His prophets, and His Son. Rather than causing them to repent and turn to God, they became more determined to get rid of Him. Now they hatched a plot, to trap Him by tricking Him into saying something that would put Him in the wrong no matter what He answered.

Verse 16.

These Pharisees now sent some of their students and some of the Herodians to confront Him. They possibly considered their questioning would be viewed as more innocent, putting Jesus off guard by sending these young men. The Pharisees considered themselves publicly as the keepers of God's Law. The Herodians were the worldly party and owed their allegiance to King Herod Antipas whose favor with Rome in large part depended on paying the tribute derived from the poll-tax. Both groups felt that Jesus was a threat to their present positions. They wanted things to remain as they were. Jesus' recent Triumphal Entry, as well as His increasing popularity with the multitudes now in Jerusalem, they both saw as a threat to their positions.

These young disciples of both groups approach Jesus with flattery, which they most likely were carefully coached to say. They address Him as Master, and describe Him as teaching God's way and being truthful. They add that He is not influenced by anyone's opinion, and therefore is impartial. Then they portray themselves as sincere seekers of God's truth.

Verse 17.

The question: "Is it lawful to give tribute unto Caesar, or not?" If He answers to not pay the tax, the Herodian students would label Him as a rebel, a Zealot, a fomenter of strife with the Romans. This could be used for an accusation worthy of his arrest. If He said to pay the tax, then the Pharisee students could accuse Him of being a traitor to the Jewish people and God - an act of blasphemy. This especially since the emperors made claims to titles that only belong to God. This would also upset the many religious pilgrims present. This could also lead to Jesus being arrested if there was the threat of a riot.

Verse 18.

Jesus calls them hypocrites. They have come to Him pretending to want a truthful answer to their question. Their real intention was to trap Him, whether He answered 'yes' or 'no'. This would either dishonor Him among the Jews, or label Him as rebel against Rome. He

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saw their wicked intent.

Verse 19.

He called for the coin used to pay the poll-tax - a denarius. It was commonly used by Jews throughout the Roman Empire and therefore easily produced by any pilgrim present. Once in hand, Jesus directs the onlookers to the coin. The tension must have been great, expecting a yes or no answer.

Verses 20,21.

He asks the crowd whose likeness and inscription is on the face of the coin. They replied: "Caesar's." Then this reply: "Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's." He clearly said to pay the tax. Caesar's rule provides law and order, good roads, and other benefits. It is just to pay for these benefits. Jesus qualifies this yes by limiting what the emperor was due to the money that bore his image. He was not to be accepted as divine, to be worshipped as the emperor portrayed on the reverse side of the coin as a high priest on a throne. The final part stressed that worship, service, and obedience were due to God.

Verse 22.

What an unexpected answer! No one could have ever imagined such a perfect answer. Naturally they were astonished. Certainly those that asked the question most of all. Jesus rightly divided the Word of Truth. He recognized God's provision for human government and the material support it was due. He also rightly stated God's sovereignty over all men and He only should be worshipped. They were left speechless and we imagine them quietly slipping away.

Verses 23,24.

On that same day a group of Sadducees approach Jesus with a question. This party denied the immortality of the soul and the resurrection of the body. They were focused on worldly matters and maintaining their power, position and wealth. Their question was an attempt to ridicule what Jesus and the Pharisees believed on this subject.

Verses 25-28.

To add weight to their proposition they begin with "Moses said". Their question begins with the law stated in Deuteronomy 25:5,6. This stipulates that if a husband dies without a male heir, the brother or nearest kin must marry the widow so that the first child of this marriage will be counted as child of the deceased. This was so the line of the deceased would be carried on. An application in Scripture is recorded in Ruth 4:1-8. Whether this law was still observed during Christ's time is not known.

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This law was brought up here to try to show how absurd they considered belief in the resurrection of the body to be. Since it involved seven brothers, most commentators consider it an absurd fabrication. On earth, only one living husband at a time. The assumption: married life continues in heaven. The example taken to the extreme: seven husbands.

Verse 29.

Jesus points out that nothing in Deuteronomy 25:5,6 suggests that it has any application in heaven. Also they should have learned from those Scriptures that teach the resurrection of the body. He also points to their lack of faith in the power of God.

Verse 30.

The main point: their premise is totally wrong, so also the rest of their argument. The glorious resurrection body is immortal. There will be no marriage - no necessity for having children since no one will die. In this sense they will be like the angels who do not marry. The Sadducees also do not believe in angels (Acts 23:8), though Scripture records their existence (Genesis 19:1,15; 28:12; 32:1).

Verses 31,32.

Jesus proceeds to instruct these religious leaders of the high priestly party concerning what the Scripture clearly records about the resurrection. Since they claim to base their argument on Scripture, Jesus asks, "Have ye not read that which was spoken unto you by God..." As if to say that they quote some Scripture without knowing the whole of what Scripture says. They have misapplied what they do know. They need to know the rest.

Jesus refers to Exodus 3:6 where God says, "I am the God of Abraham...He is not the God of the dead but of the living." The present tense means that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are alive and continue in personal relationships with God. This certainly implies that their bodies will one day be resurrected and glorified when reunited with soul and spirit.

Verse 33.

The crowds were again astounded at Christ's teaching. These leaders who purported to be the most educated and important leaders of the Jewish nation, were being taught by this unimportant and unapproved Galilean. He knew the Scriptures better than they did. He could speak to the truth, in spite of the apparent paradox of the leaders' complicated questions.

Lesson XXXVI

Matthew 22:34-40. The Greatest Commandment.

34 ¶ But when the Pharisees had heard that he had put the Sadducees to silence, they were gathered together.
35 Then one of them, which was a lawyer, asked him a question, tempting him, and saying,
36 Master, which is the great commandment in the law?
37 Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.
38 This is the first and great commandment.
39 And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.
40 On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.

Verse 34.

Jesus had silenced the Sadducees concerning their attempt to ridicule belief in bodily resurrection, with their question about the wife of 7 brothers. Because the Pharisees believed this doctrine, this must have pleased them. But they did not want this to increase Jesus' popularity or influence with the multitudes. This time they did not send their students, but a law expert from their own ranks. The question he asks is accepted by Jesus as a worthwhile one.

Verses 35,36.

These men and the rabbis they represented devoted much time to lengthy debates about the commandments - which were great or small, going into hair-slitting legalistic detail. They counted 613 commandments, 248 positive, 365 negative. Their ultimate question: which was the most important?

Verses 37-40.

Jesus' truthfully clear and beautiful reply: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets."

The complete duty of the moral and spiritual law is love (Romans 13:9,10; I Corinthians 13), directed toward God and man.

The whole man is united: the heart, where the will and needs and desires originate. The soul, where emotions are active. The mind, the thinking, intellectual, and decision making, moral part. The point is that man should love God with all the faculties he has been given by his Creator. The word 'all' emphasizes the extent man must return what God first gives - greater love than we can even comprehend, especially in the gift of His Son. Our response must be attempting our all.

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The second commandment resembles the first because love is also required. The neighbor is also a receiver of God's love and therefore is our equal and worthy of our love also. (I John 4:21.)

The law and the prophets (the entire Old Testament) point to, record, describe, promise, typify, testify to, invite, exhort, and predict the love of God for man. The only proper reasonable and truthful response is returning that love, in awe, thankfulness, and acceptance.

Mark mentions in Mark 12:32-34 that this lawyer approvingly repeats Jesus' answer, for which Jesus praises him.

Matthew 22:41-46. Opinions about the Christ.

41 ¶ While the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them,
 42 saying, What think ye of Christ? whose son is he? They say unto him, The son of David.
 43 He saith unto them, How then doth David in spirit call him Lord, saying,
 44 The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, till I make thine enemies thy footstool?
 45 If David then call him Lord, how is he his son?
 46 And no man was able to answer him a word, neither durst any man from that day forth ask him any more questions.

Verses 41,42.

We can assume that Jesus is speaking to the same group of Pharisees that had asked concerning the greatest commandment. Jesus' answer had focused on love as fulfillment of the Law and the Prophets. Now, in questioning them about the Christ, He is leading their thoughts to have faith in Him. What do they perceive that the Christ would say and do to show the love of God to man?

According to all accounts, the majority of the religious leaders continued to reject Jesus as Savior, yet there were some that did come to faith in Him. This is His last public conversation with these men.

Though Jesus is asking about Himself, He phrases the question in the third person, "The Christ", so that they may answer without directly affirming that Jesus is the Christ. They never would have done that. They taught that the expected Messiah (Christ being the Greek translation) was the Son of David (mark 12:35), and this is the correct teaching of Scripture (II Samuel 7:12,13; Amos 9:11; Micah 5:2, etc.).

They had been upset that Jesus had been called this by the multitude at the Triumphal Entry, and that Jesus had accepted being called "Son of David". He is now going to direct their thinking beyond the idea that Messiah was just a special man, born a direct descendant of David. The point: David's son in the flesh is also

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David's Lord. He is fully man, and fully God. He begins with what they know and will agree with: they said to Him, David's.

Verses 43-45.

The second point: David, speaking by inspiration of the Holy Spirit in Psalms 110 where David calls Him Lord, how is He his son? The Lord God assured my Lord (David's Lord, the Messiah) of complete triumph over every foe; every enemy will be under His feet, like a foot stool. From ancient times the ultimate sign of complete victory was the placing of the winner's foot upon the neck of the defeated, the ultimate subjugation, and control over the other's life.

Jesus says this Psalm was written by David by inspiration. David calls the Messiah Lord. This same Messiah has clearly been documented as having been born in the line of David through Mary physically, and legally through Joseph. How can He be David's son, means how can He be only or just David's son. He is in fact before David as well as his offspring.

The promise of this prophetic Psalm also points to Christ's ultimate victory over all enemies. This must have been comforting and reassuring that the present path of bitter betrayal, condemnation and death on the cross would lead to triumph over death and unto glory with the Father in heaven.

Verse 46.

There was no reply! And no one, from that day on, dared to ask Him another question. They had attempted to catch Him making mistakes via their trick questions. They wanted Him to be tripped up in public so He would be discredited. They had no conception that His perception, understanding, and spiritual insight were so far above their own. In the end, they were dumbfounded - a clearer and more direct example of the meaning of this would be impossible to find. Case closed.

Matthew 23:1-12. General Teaching Against the Religious Leaders.

1 Then spake Jesus to the multitude, and to his disciples,
2 saying, The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat:
3 all therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do;
but do not ye after their works: for they say, and do not.
4 For they bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and lay them
on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one
of their fingers.
5 But all their works they do for to be seen of men: they make broad
their phylacteries, and enlarge the borders of their garments,
6 and love the uppermost rooms at feasts, and the chief seats in the
synagogues,
7 and greetings in the markets, and to be called of men, Rabbi,
Rabbi.
8 But be not ye called Rabbi: for one is your Master, even Christ;

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and all ye are brethren.

9 And call no man your father upon the earth: for one is your Father, which is in heaven.

10 Neither be ye called masters: for one is your Master, even Christ.

11 But he that is greatest among you shall be your servant.

12 And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted.

We can assume that Jesus is still speaking in the Temple. 24:1 mentions Him leaving the Temple. This discourse to His disciples and the attentive crowd was uninterrupted. Jesus pointedly refers to the scribes and Pharisees but does not address them directly. It can be assumed that they left.

The scribes were recognized as the experts and teachers of the Old Testament Scriptures. The Pharisees claimed to be faithful followers of their teaching. Most scribes were Pharisees but not all Pharisees were scribes.

Verses 1-3.

It was common at that time that every synagogue had a special seat called "Moses' chair", where the local or visiting scribe would sit to proclaim the will of God so revealed to Moses. Jesus advises the people to obey what they said as long as they spoke according to the Scriptures. As long as they represented the Law of Moses, they were worthy of being listened to. Jesus says this in spite of this group's rejection and hostility and plotting against Him. The great emphasis is on what conduct they were guilty of. He tells the people not to do as they did. Their actions were not true to what they taught and claimed to believe.

Verse 4.

Jesus now describes the habit carried down from the ancient rabbis, now added to by these scribes and Pharisees. This was the habit of adding greatly detailed regulations - in effect burying the true intent of God's Law under the burdensome stipulations. Jesus points out that these men had become experts at avoiding burdens. They had ways to avoid obligations that at times they shared with others, for their own benefit. They were not willing to remove burdens from the people's shoulders, but refuse to actually follow their own regulations.

Verses 5-7.

What they actually did was for the attention of the public. They sought respect and praise for their position and piety.

Phylacteries were leather boxes made to hold slips of paper on which Scripture passages were written. One was to be fastened (by strap) to the forehead and left during prayer (near the heart). They

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were to be reminders of God's glorious deeds for His people. This is still a practice among devout Jews today. Jesus is describing these men and widening their straps so they would be easily seen in public - drawing attention to themselves as especially devout. They also enlarged and/or lengthened their robes' tassels for the same reason - to be more easily noticed.

They also wanted to be honored with the best seats at the banquets, and the chief seats in the synagogues, where they could see everyone - but more importantly, everyone could see them and their prominent position.

Even in the marketplace, they wanted to be addressed with respect, as to their position in society. They also desired to be accorded the high calling of "rabbi", an important teacher of God's Law. These were the desires and motives of these religious leaders - public acclaim and honor.

Verses 8-10.

Jesus now turns to strongly advise against all the evil of these men. His followers are not to strive for higher rank, to be over and above their fellow believers. They are to recognize the One Who is their Teacher, Jesus Himself. Also, they are not to call any earthly leader their spiritual father. Only One is their spiritual Father Who is in heaven. They are not even to allow people to call them leaders or guides. One is their leader, Christ.

Teachers of the Law were commonly addressed as rabbi, or teacher. Members of the Sanhedrin (the High Priestly Party) were addressed as 'father' (Acts 7:2). Some highly respected persons that had died would also be referred to by titles of respect: father, leader, guide.

Jesus is stressing the fact that no person, whatever their earthy title, was worthy of the reverence, praise, and honor of men. Only Jesus Himself, as God's appointed Savior, Teacher, and Leader, was worthy of all of these.

By saying that all of His followers are brothers points out their equal relationship with each other. They are children of God and have no right to puff themselves up or look down on any of the others. This was the opposite of the Pharisees who considered themselves far above the "rabble that knows not the law" (John 7:49).

Verse 11.

Jesus states the law of the kingdom (as in 20:26,27). To be great (from God's point of view) one must serve others. That is the spiritual measure of greatness. Jesus showed this throughout His ministry, and ultimately by His death on the cross, to save mankind.

Verse 12.

A proverb (Proverbs 29:23) of spiritual truth. This has been

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recorded in the lives of many Biblical characters as well: Sennacherib (II Chronicles 32:14,21; Nebuchadnezzar (Daniel 4:30-33); Herod Agrippa (Acts 12:21-23).

On the other hand, God promises to dwell with the person who has 'a contrite and humble spirit.' (Isaiah 57:15.) This teaching on humility is one of the most mentioned subjects throughout Christ's ministry as well as the rest of the New Testament. This certainly shows its truth and importance. 'Not of works lest any man can boast' was Paul's expression of its negative. It is the humble that recognizes their sinful nature and seeks God's forgiveness through His Son. The humble will trust in God's care and guidance and through Christ will live a life striving to please Him by carrying out His will. This includes a life of serving God as one also serves others, sharing their faith in our living Savior with whoever will listen.

Lesson XXXVII

Matthew 23:13-36. The 7 Woes.

13 ¶ But woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye shut up the kingdom of heaven against men: for ye neither go in yourselves, neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in.

14 Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye devour widows' houses, and for a pretense make long prayer: therefore ye shall receive the greater damnation.

15 Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte; and when he is made, ye make him twofold more the child of hell than yourselves.

16 ¶ Woe unto you, ye blind guides, which say, Whosoever shall swear by the temple, it is nothing; but whosoever shall swear by the gold of the temple, he is a debtor!

17 Ye fools and blind: for whether is greater, the gold, or the temple that sanctifieth the gold?

18 And, Whosoever shall swear by the altar, it is nothing; but whosoever sweareth by the gift that is upon it, he is guilty.

19 Ye fools and blind: for whether is greater, the gift, or the altar that sanctifieth the gift?

20 Whoso therefore shall swear by the altar, sweareth by it, and by all things thereon.

21 And whoso shall swear by the temple, sweareth by it, and by him that dwelleth therein.

22 And he that shall swear by heaven, sweareth by the throne of God, and by him that sitteth thereon.

23 ¶ Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone.

24 Ye blind guides, which strain at a gnat, and swallow a camel.

25 ¶ Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full of extortion and excess.

26 Thou blind Pharisee, cleanse first that which is within the cup and platter, that the outside of them may be clean also.

27 ¶ Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness.

28 Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity.

29 ¶ Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! because ye build the tombs of the prophets, and garnish the sepulchres of the righteous,

30 and say, If we had been in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets.

31 Wherefore ye be witnesses unto yourselves, that ye are the

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children of them which killed the prophets.

32 Fill ye up then the measure of your fathers.

33 Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell?

34 Wherefore, behold, I send unto you prophets, and wise men, and scribes: and some of them ye shall kill and crucify; and some of them shall ye scourge in your synagogues, and persecute them from city to city:

35 that upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel unto the blood of Zechari'ah son of Berechi'ah, whom ye slew between the temple and the altar.

36 Verily I say unto you, All these things shall come upon this generation.

These are addressed to the scribes and Pharisees. As previously mentioned, it is nowhere mentioned that they are present or have returned. This was Christ's stern rebuke of the very group that knew best the Scriptures, and should have known and acknowledged those that spoke of His coming as the Suffering Servant. They should have been the first to accept Him, but they as a group had openly rejected Him. They tried to turn the people and His disciples away from Him. These were supposed to be the people of God, of the Law, the teachers of the people in the ways of God. Instead they were the opposite: selfish and full of pride and self-righteousness. Jesus strongly warned the people against their false leadership through the pronouncements of their guilt and doom.

Verse 13.

The word hypocrites: those whose public life and private life are opposite; a fraud, deceiver, phony; a wolf in sheep's clothing.

The term "kingdom of heaven", God's reign in human hearts in earth through Christ, later to be perfected in heaven.

Jesus is saying that the leaders have rejected God's offering of salvation through Christ and are also trying to keep others from accepting Christ. Theirs was a doctrine of salvation by works (and what a burden of regulations they promulgated!). Thus they taught against forgiveness, and grace, and mercy. Those that followed these men were heavily influenced to also oppose Jesus.

Verse 14.

This woe criticizes their taking advantage of widows by defrauding them (thus causing them to lose their property). Second, against their long public prayers, done for show. Greater responsibility misused, means greater damnation.

Verse 15.

During Christ's time there was a great deal of missionary

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activity by the Jews. From the beginning this was part of God's plan for the nation: Genesis 22:18; Exodus 12:49; Leviticus 19:34. The chosen nation was charged to be God's witnesses to the entire pagan world. The synagogues were open to visitors. The Old Testament had been translated into Greek. Those who turned to the Jewish religion of worshipping the One True God, Jehovah, were called proselytes. They were to be found in a variety of degrees of acceptance of the worship of God. Some simply attended synagogue and gave up their pagan worship. Others were baptized and gave up their pagan worship. Others were baptized and brought sacrifices, being circumcised, and promised to submit to all the commandments, including all the regulations of the rabbis. They were accepted into the Jewish community and given a new name.

These men obviously wanted the new convert to become just like them - a legalistic, ritualistic, hair-splitting Pharisee, with fanatical zeal for their salvation by works system. Their enthusiasm going even beyond those men. Jesus describes their zeal as "twice as much a son of hell as you are yourselves." "Son of hell" meant behavior worthy of that destination.

Verses 16-22.

The next woe. The religious leaders were turning the meaning of God's truth upside down. They pretended to lead, while being blind to God's truth. The emphasis is that everything that a person swears by belongs to God and therefore is binding. The Jews had such ridiculous and mixed up exceptions, thus allowing a person to not meet their obligation. The sanctuary and the altar give value and sacredness to the articles in or on them.

Verses 23,24.

Woe to these religious leaders because they spent careful consideration on the tithing ordinance to the point of even taking a tenth portion of the small aromatic herbs they grew in their gardens. They also required their followers to do the same. The Law of Moses (Leviticus 27:30-33; Deuteronomy 14:22-29) about tithing doesn't mention that requirement. The true requirement included the great crops of the land, grain, wine, and oil. Just as they did with fasting, hand-rinsing, Sabbath observance, they added uncalled for details and regulations far beyond God's intention.

While paying attention to the above, they were neglecting the more important requirements of the Law: justice, mercy, faithfulness. Being fair and helpful to the neighbor was paramount. This was the opposite of how these men treated the common people. The focus was supposed to be on God and walking humbly before Him, in loyalty and faith to Him.

Jesus summarizes His observations by saying that the law of tithing was correct to observe, but also the others, which they

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neglected, should equally be observed.

Then Jesus uses a colorful saying to make the same point. That they are blind (spiritually) makes it impossible for them to see that they strain out a gnat while swallowing a camel. But to be blind and also claim to guide others is doubly disastrous.

Verses 25,26.

This woe deals with eating vessels, cups, and dishes. The Scribes and Pharisees pay their attention to the ceremonial cleansing of the outside of these utensils without considering the contents; how the contents were obtained, or how the contents were consumed. What they had in their containers were gained by evil deeds: extortion and intemperance. This points to their greed and how they used their ill-gotten gains.

Jesus now turns to the singular to make His pronouncement. He calls him "blind Pharisee". The inside of the cup must be cleaned. Whatever is done ceremonially to clean the outside of the utensil will never effect the important part, the inside, which should be purity of heart. If this is done first then the outside is clearly seen as unimportant. Not to understand this is to be spiritually blind. The way Jesus states this suggests that this is by choice.

Verses 27,28.

These verses also describe the contrast between the outside and the inside. The focus of these hypocrites is on outward appearance, the ritual and not the true intentions of the heart. Whitewashed tombs, looking beautiful on the outside, only enclose dead men's bones and putrefaction. If anyone, the pilgrims coming into Jerusalem for Passover, touched even a human bone, would become ceremonially unclean. Because of this it was a tradition to whitewash tombs with powdered lime a few weeks earlier to set them off. Obviously only rotting corpses were within.

Apply this to yourselves, Jesus suggests. They put on the appearance of being righteous, but within they are living a lie, and going against the true laws of God. From God's point of view it is the heart of man, the moral and spiritual attitude and motivation that matters. Jesus is observing that these men's lives reveal their disregarding of the truth of God's Law.

Verses 29-32.

The final woe. Again hypocrites. They build new structures to embellish the places where the prophets were buried. They also claim that if they had lived during the time of these men of God they would have not taken part in shedding their blood. Yet now before them was the greatest prophet God ever sent and they were plotting His murder.

This also suggested that they acknowledged that their fathers were murderers of the prophets. So now they were ready to rise to the

Lesson XXXVII Continued

same amount of guilt as their forbears. They have taken upon themselves the responsibility, and so also the guilt and punishment.

Verse 33.

Again figurative language to emphasize the true nature of these men. Their nature will condemn them as poisonous snakes. They certainly shall not escape being sentenced to hell.

Verses 34-36.

Jesus has described the timeless history of God's dealing with man. Whoever He sends to speak for Him is ill-treated, beaten or killed. The Old Testament records this happening over and over. Jesus has told the present scribes and Pharisees that they are doing the same thing to Him, and will receive the same punishment.

Then in these verses He predicts how these same men will treat His own followers. He uses the terms prophets, wise men, and scribes to emphasize that their roles will be equal to those that God sent before. They will be speaking and writing God's wisdom in Christ, which includes prophecy. They will also write the New Testament and teach it to others.

The three terms actually describe the same Apostles in their three-fold roles. These men will be killed, crucified, flogged and pursued from town to town. Jesus Himself was about to be crucified, as was Peter much later. Paul was part of those who cruelly treated Christians before his conversion. Paul himself was extremely mistreated many times as recorded in the book of Acts and his letters. This was within God's purpose in spreading the Gospel. A faith worth dying for is a powerful witness, especially to those God is calling.

This also includes the rewards for the persecuted, and the punishment of the persecutors. They will be equally guilty as all the murderers recorded in the Old Testament, from the first who slew Abel, the to least, who killed the prophet Zechariah in the Temple. All this in spite of the many warnings from God they refuse to repent. They therefore claim their place in the line of murderers from the beginning. As a result the Jewish nation will within that generation cease to exist. They will also suffer eternal damnation.

Matthew 37-39. Lament.

37 ¶ O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!

38 Behold, your house is left unto you desolate.

39 For I say unto you, Ye shall not see me henceforth, till ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord.

Lesson XXXVII Continued

As Jesus closes His last message given in public, He shows great compassion and the deadly seriousness concerning what will happen as a result of His rejection. His sadness is addressed to Jerusalem, the capital of Israel, its heart and center, the place of the Temple where God was supposed to be worshipped in spirit and in truth. To say it twice indicates intense emotion. How tragically sad it was that this was the place where God's messengers had been killed.

His use of the word Jerusalem in fact represented the whole nation and His ministry everywhere He has gone. Jesus then uses a simile. He describes what happens when a storm approaches a chicken yard. The hen spreads her wings out and calls her chicks to come so she can protect them from harm under her wings. Jesus says He saw what was coming and tried calling them to Him to protect them, but they refused to come to Him. Their refusal has disastrous results. Their homeland will be like a deserted place.

After His death and resurrection, Jesus will not reveal Himself in public (specifically to the Jews) until He returns at His Second Coming in glory, when every eye shall see Him. Then everyone will say, "Blessed is He Who comes in the name of the Lord." Whether believer or not, all must pay homage to Him, so majestic and supernatural will be His appearing.

Lesson XXXVIII

Matthew 24:1-14. The Last Things: The Beginning.

1 And Jesus went out, and departed from the temple: and his disciples came to him for to show him the buildings of the temple.

2 And Jesus said unto them, See ye not all these things? verily I say unto you, There shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down.

3 ¶ And as he sat upon the mount of Olives, the disciples came unto him privately, saying, Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?

4 And Jesus answered and said unto them, Take heed that no man deceive you.

5 For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many.

6 And ye shall hear of wars and rumors of wars: see that ye be not troubled: for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet.

7 For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places.

8 All these are the beginning of sorrows.

9 ¶ Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you: and ye shall be hated of all nations for my name's sake.

10 And then shall many be offended, and shall betray one another, and shall hate one another.

11 And many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many.

12 And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold.

13 But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved.

14 And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come.

Verse 1.

The Occasion. A Tuesday, a few days before His death. A day full and memorable at the Temple. Now in late afternoon as they are leaving, the disciples approach Jesus to remark and call His attention to the beauty and grandeur of the Temple buildings.

Apparently they have gotten the impression that in His previous discourse where He describes what disaster was to befall Jerusalem. Would that include the Temple - would their house of worship become a deserted place. They are wanting to make sure that this glorious and holy building is to be destroyed. Could this be even possible?

Verse 2.

His answer dramatically describes not only its desertion but also its complete destruction, to the point that not one stone will

Lesson XXXVIII Continued

be left upon another. They shall all be thrown down. All that they see, Jesus solemnly assures them that it will be leveled.

Verse 3.

At some point later, after having arrived at the Mount of Olives and sitting down, the disciples again privately come to Jesus. They must believe what He has told them, for now they wish to know when this will happen. Possibly thinking the events were related in time, they add what will be the sign of His coming, and the end of the age. They were looking across the valley at the city of Jerusalem and the roof of the Temple of gold, the white marble buildings. Mark mentions that Peter, James, John, and Andrew (Mark 13:3) are the ones who come forward in somber sadness to voice their concern to Jesus.

They apparently think that the destruction of the city and temple must also be the end of the world. They were related, as the first was a forecast of the destruction of Israel in 70 A.D. but not a sign of the end. He instructs them not to think of any disaster as a sign of the end of the age. Nor should they be misled when they hear of anyone claiming to be Christ, this also is not an "end times" sign. Jesus knew that many would come as false Christs and prophets to mislead many for their own purposes, always selfish and destructive. They go against the love, forgiveness, and truth of God's salvation through Christ. This will cause lawlessness to increase: the breakdown of the family, respect for marriage gone, charity, respect, and honor to God, also gone. We have certainly seen this happen during the past century and ever increasing. Also we have seen the disasters resulting from so called Christian cults.

Another common occurrence will be wars and rumors of wars. These are to be expected and should not be upsetting. This happens because of nations and kingdoms that foreshadow the Second Coming, though there was to be a lengthy interval between the two. They were interested in His Second Coming. Though at this time it must be surmised that they had little real understanding about His death, resurrection, and ascension. That He was going to return to them, and that they had a place in His reign they seemed ready to accept. This question gave rise to the important teaching of the Last Things that now begins.

Verses 4-12. The Beginning of Birth Pains.

Jesus must explain that what they assume will happen in a short time, and in succession, actually there are intervals while they build in intensity and closeness. Just as birth pains begin in low intensity and long intervals. As birth comes nearer, they are closer and closer together, and greatly increasing in intense pain.

One will rise up against another in arms. Though the Roman Empire had experienced a long era of peace, this was an exception. The amount of wars since that period seems to be continuous with

Lesson XXXVIII Continued

increasing degrees of destruction. There is no indication that this will stop. Any date-setting based on wars would be wrong. Also disturbance in the physical realm will take place. Jesus mentions earthquakes and disasters that they cause: famines, pestilence. These will increase in frequency and intensity close to His Second Coming. But these also actually give no sign to calculate that event. It does predict increasing birth pains (contractions) in all aspects of nature: volcanoes, tidal waves, droughts, tornadoes, flooding, hurricanes, earthquakes.

Most of the above were recorded during the ten years before the destruction of Jerusalem. There have been records of many great disasters from that time to our own. Now, it seems that hardly a day goes by without some kind of natural disaster somewhere in the world.

The history of the church from the beginning records (beginning in Acts) persecution (tribulation), and execution for their faith in Christ. There also have been and continue to be nations that outlaw, persecute, and kill Christians. Jesus also describes what happens when persecutions cause many to stop professing their faith openly, and many will betray others for fear or reward.

The misleading by false prophets will cause many false gospels and ways contrary to the true teaching of God's Word. Lawlessness will increase as the righteous influence of God's word and true Christians will be taught against, disregarded, or ignored. What were once sins, become alternative ways to live, all measured by each individual's desires. Love of self causes the love of the majority to grow cold. Christians, considered backward "fundamentalists", are discounted as behind the times and even intolerant.

As the end comes nearer we can draw the conclusion that all these things will happen closer together, be more extensive and intensive, and destructive. Many will also happen at the same time, leading to the final days of destruction in the Great Tribulation.

Verse 13.

The saved will endure to the end. Just as the individual believer will endure these things to the end of their life, so also the church will endure until the end of the age.

Verse 14.

Jesus confirms that this gospel of the kingdom of God shall be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations. Then shall come the end. That the proclamation of the gospel would eventually reach all the nations of the world, certainly indicates hundreds of years, a period of time known only to the Father, and then the end. When the final believer accepts Christ, then the Rapture of the completed Church, and shortly thereafter the Great Tribulation begins.

Church history records the spread of the Gospel to many nations,

Lesson XXXVIII Continued

still today reaching more and more areas in the world. The work continues but is not over yet.

Matthew 24:15-31. The Great Tribulation.

15 ¶ When ye therefore shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place, (whoso readeth, let him understand,)

16 then let them which be in Judea flee into the mountains:

17 let him which is on the housetop not come down to take any thing out of his house:

18 neither let him which is in the field return back to take his clothes.

19 And woe unto them that are with child, and to them that give suck in those days!

20 But pray ye that your flight be not in the winter, neither on the sabbath day:

21 for then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be.

22 And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened.

23 Then if any man shall say unto you, Lo, here is Christ, or there; believe it not.

24 For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall show great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect.

25 Behold, I have told you before.

26 Wherefore if they shall say unto you, Behold, he is in the desert; go not forth: behold, he is in the secret chambers; believe it not.

27 For as the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be.

28 For wheresoever the carcass is, there will the eagles be gathered together.

29 ¶ Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken:

30 and then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.

31 And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.

Jesus has just explained to the disciples that the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple was not the sign of the end of the age. Even the other so-called signs (wars, earthquakes, etc.) happen over a lengthy period, as well as the worldwide proclamation of the Gospel

Lesson XXXVIII Continued

- then the end.

Verses 15,16.

Here He begins with "Now" to describe the details of what and when will be the signs of the soon coming (within that generation) destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple. The way Jesus describes this event makes it also possible as also describing more than one event. Daniel 11:31 predicted the desecration of the Temple by Antiochus Epiphanies (175-164 B.C.). When the holy places of the Lord are desecrated, destruction will be meted out. This had happened several times in Jewish history. This would happen again when the idolatrous legions of Rome, with the emperor's image on their standards, an emperor who required worship laid siege to Jerusalem (Luke 21:20). This also foreshadowed the great, final violation by the Antichrist.

This event, the days just before Jerusalem's fall in 70 A.D., the Roman legions will desecrate holy soil, city and the Temple. It was consecrated to the Lord. Jesus warns His followers in Judea that they must immediately flee to the hills. In the fulfillment, the majority of the Jews rushed into the city, where hundreds of thousands died. There is no record of how many Christians escaped.

Verse 17,18.

Anyone who is on the flat roof of his house, must get down by an outside ladder, without entering the house to retrieve anything. He must flee as quickly as possible. Also the farmer in the field working, must not even go after his coat at the edge of the field. To delay would lead to capture or death.

Verse 19.

Jesus expresses His deep sympathy for those pregnant or nursing babies at that time. Their plight will be very dangerous.

Verse 20.

He tells them to pray their flight will not occur in winter or on the sabbath. Winter, with it being the rainy season, the possibility of snow as well as the cold temperature would make travel and hiding in the hills much more difficult. Traveling on the Sabbath would be more difficult because the strict rules of the Pharisees would restrict any from helping travelers in any way.

Verses 21,22.

Jesus again looks beyond the soon coming distress to the final one: the great tribulation, such as has never been since the beginning of time until that time. And there shall never be again. If those days were not cut short, no one would be saved. Those days will be cut short for the sake of the elect. This shall be a brief time occurring immediately before Christ's return (verses 29-31, also Revelation 11:7-9; 20:3,7-9).

Lesson XXXVIII Continued

Verse 23-25.

Jesus warns that there shall be false Christs, claiming they are from God and only they know the truth. They are not to be believed. False prophets will claim that they know who the Christ is, and perform great signs and miracles to fool, if it was possible, even the elect. But of course, that is not possible. His followers are not to believe any report or signs that deceive. Jesus here predicts these things will prepare His followers for His coming, which will only reinforce their faith in Him.

Verse 26.

Some will suggest that He is in the wilderness or in the inner rooms, as if He would only reveal Himself to a chosen few. They are to be rejected. His coming will not be in a remote place or a dark hidden room.

Verse 27.

As clear as lightning flashing out of the east across the sky to the west, so shall be the Coming of the Son of Man. Christ's coming in the heavens will be just as visible to those on earth.

Verse 28.

Wherever there is a corpse, there the vultures will gather. The figure is the condition of the world of men. They have reached the extreme end - morally and spiritually - to resemble the dead. The world's cup of iniquity is full. It is then that Christ shall come to condemn that world. That will be the final time God's elect are persecuted and killed.

Verse 29-31.

What follows have the most significant Old Testament references to this time, plus a few from the New Testament.

The Signs of the Second Coming

Immediately after the tribulation of those days,

The sun shall be darkened,

And the moon shall not give her light

(Isaiah 13:10; Ezekiel 32:7; Joel 2:10,31; Hebrews 3:4;

Revelation 6:12)

And the stars shall fall from the sky,

(Isaiah 34:4; Revelation 6:13)

The powers of the heavens shall be shaken,

(Joel 2:10; Haggai 2:6,21; Luke 21:25,26; Revelation 6:13)

And then the sign of the Son of man shall appear in the sky and then all the tribes of the earth shall mourn,

Zechariah 12:10,12, Revelation 1:7)

And they shall see the Son of man coming on the clouds of the

Lesson XXXVIII Continued

sky with power and great glory;

(Daniel 7:13,14; Matthew 16:27; 26:64)

And He shall send forth His angels with a loud trumpet blast,

(Isaiah 27:13; Matthew 13:41, 16:27; I Corinthians 15:52; I Thessalonians 4:16)

And they shall gather His elect from the four winds, from the one end of heaven to the other.

(Deuteronomy 30:4, Zechariah 2:6.)

At the end of the tribulation, the earthquakes, and volcanoes, and violent storms, the atmosphere will be filled with dust, blocking the sun and moon. Stars will fall (meteors), and the powers of the heavens shaken. It will be at the darkest time in man's history that Jesus returns in glory. A brightness streaming down, as being seen from the East to the West, with ten thousands of His saints, as the Messiah to His people Israel, whom they pierced. All the tribes of the earth shall mourn, conscious of their own rejection of God's Son. The wicked shall be terrified. (Zechariah 12:10,12; Revelation 1:7, Revelation 6:15-17.)

Then the trumpet blast, the angels gather the elect from every point on the compass, from everywhere. These are the Jews and the Tribulation saints that remained alive until His coming. The Church will come with Christ from Heaven, having been raptured before the beginning of the Great Tribulation. After this the Millennial reign of Christ on earth begins.

Lesson XXXIX

Matthew 24:32-51. Last Things Continued.

32 ¶ Now learn a parable of the fig tree; When his branch is yet tender, and putteth forth leaves, ye know that summer is nigh:
33 so likewise ye, when ye shall see all these things, know that it is near, even at the doors.
34 Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled.
35 Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away.
36 ¶ But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only.
37 But as the days of Noah were, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be.
38 For as in the days that were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the ark,
39 and knew not until the flood came, and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be.
40 Then shall two be in the field; the one shall be taken, and the other left.
41 Two women shall be grinding at the mill; the one shall be taken, and the other left.
42 Watch therefore; for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come.
43 But know this, that if the goodman of the house had known in what watch the thief would come, he would have watched, and would not have suffered his house to be broken up.
44 Therefore be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh.
45 ¶ Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his lord hath made ruler over his household, to give them meat in due season?
46 Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing.
47 Verily I say unto you, That he shall make him ruler over all his goods.
48 But and if that evil servant shall say in his heart, My lord delayeth his coming;
49 and shall begin to smite his fellow servants, and to eat and drink with the drunken;
50 the lord of that servant shall come in a day when he looketh not for him, and in an hour that he is not aware of,
51 and shall cut him asunder, and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Verses 32,33. Lesson of the Fig Tree.

An instructive comparison (parable or lesson). Tender branches and young leaves emerging indicate spring with the soon

Lesson XXXIX Continued

approach of summer. Then, when the disciples see those things predicted, related to the destruction of the Temple (the first question they had asked) take place, then the fall of Jerusalem and the Temple should be considered at the gates.

Verses 34,35.

Jesus sets these words apart as a solemn declaration. These words were to be impressed on their minds. These signs of the Second Coming Jesus declares that the Jewish people (an acceptable translation of the word also used for generation). Thus verse 34 begins Jesus' answer to the disciple's second question - about the time of His coming. The context of verse 36 points directly to this meaning - that about that day and hour no one knows, etc...Verse 35 also refers to the passing away of earth and heaven. After the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple, the Jewish nation was eradicated; there was no guarantee that the Jewish people would survive the dispersion to one day be reestablished as a nation.

"My words shall never pass away," certainly emphasizes the power of the truth of Jesus' pronouncements. Though the present heavens and earth will pass away, His words will remain.

Verse 36.

No one knows of that day and hour, but the Father only. This clearly states the sinfulness of everyone that has or will try to predict the date of Jesus' return. There have been many over the centuries and everyone was and will be wrong.

Verses 37-39.

It will take place as in the days of Noah. With many years of warning, so will the Second Coming of Christ come as suddenly as the flood. Just like when Noah was building the ark (Genesis 5:32-7:5), he preached to the people of the coming destruction. They, however, continued to live as they had always lived: eating, drinking, marrying, and giving in marriage. Not evil in themselves, these activities were only wrong when they became the total and materialistic pursuit and focus of one's entire life. They promise security, they become selfish ends, and they completely leave out God and spiritual things. The people of Noah's day did not awaken to their peril until it was too late. Noah entered the ark. The Flood swept all the people away. Just as disastrous will be Christ's Second Coming to the earth.

Verses 40,41.

These verses describe the situation when Jesus returns, the time of choosing is over. Just as when Noah entered the ark, those left suffered sudden disaster and death. Jesus describes two men in a field, one is taken, one is left, and two women grinding grain, one

Lesson XXXIX Continued

is taken, one is left. Those taken are being gathered by the angels as God's elect to be with Christ. Those left are the wicked, the rejecters of God's grace and mercy, and they will, as those in the Flood, face everlasting punishment.

Verse 42.

Not knowing the day or hour is God's purpose for us. Sinful and selfish tendencies are to be avoided - such as date-setting, or assuming it must be far into the future. Both prevent people from being about the Lord's work. Not knowing means be prepared and watchful every day. Be constantly on the alert, spiritually focused, loins girded, lamps burning (Luke 12:35). Paul describe it as how expectantly the Bride looks for the Bridegroom (I and II Thessalonians).

Verse 43.

Comparing the Lord's coming with a night burglar is also found in I Thessalonians 5:2-4; II Peter 3:10; Revelation 3:3; 16:15. Each stresses a different aspect.

First - the owner should have been watching.

Second - it was promised to happen, the resulting catastrophe should be an incentive to right living.

Third - for the lost the event is terror, for the vigilant (the believer) a reason for joy.

Common to all sudden and unexpected. This includes the danger of being unprepared. This focuses on the necessity of being constantly on the alert. Then the homeowner would not have allowed the burglary.

Verse 44.

Another warning, slightly different in its phrasing: "be ready," very close to "be alert". Both prepared in mind and heart at all times is what is necessary. Again the statement: no man will know when, what day or hour.

Verse 45.

What should the "alert" and "ready" disciple be about. "Faithful" is the answer and also "sensible". Thus begins the Parable of the Faithful and Wicked Servants. The good servant takes care of the other servants when his master goes on a journey of undetermined length.

Verse 46.

A special blessing is pronounced upon the faithful servant, who will be doing his duty in caring for those within his responsibility (his fellow servants). This means special favor and approval from the master. The servant has continued to fulfill his duty awaiting his master's return, though that day is unknown. This also describes the

Lesson XXXVIII Continued

heart and mind of the faithful disciple waiting on Christ's coming.

Verse 47.

That disciple shall be rewarded to the degree and position he performed in his earthly life, just as the master in the parable would set the faithful steward over all his possessions.

Verses 48-51.

The negative side: The wicked servant takes advantage of his master's absence. He will mistreat his fellow servants, and become slack and a drunkard, disregarding his responsibilities. He says to himself, in his heart, that his master is going to be gone a long time - therefore, why not have some fun (according to the world's ways)?

To beat his fellow servants shows cruelty, thinking he can get away with it. The return will be unexpected and sudden. The day and hour result in sudden destruction of the wicked servant. This was the appropriate punishment for the hypocrites. He had accepted the job and its responsibilities, then done the opposite. His punishment shall be as severe as his acts of wickedness - a place where there shall be weeping and grinding of teeth. This pictures the experience of everlasting despair and hopelessness. The grinding of teeth pictures excruciating pain and frustration.

Matthew 25:1-13. The Ten Girls.

1 Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins, which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom.
2 And five of them were wise, and five were foolish.
3 They that were foolish took their lamps, and took no oil with them:
4 but the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps.
5 While the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept.
6 And at midnight there was a cry made, Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him.
7 Then all those virgins arose, and trimmed their lamps.
8 And the foolish said unto the wise, Give us of your oil; for our lamps are gone out.
9 But the wise answered, saying, Not so; lest there be not enough for us and you: but go ye rather to them that sell, and buy for yourselves.
10 And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came; and they that were ready went in with him to the marriage: and the door was shut.
11 Afterward came also the other virgins, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us.
12 But he answered and said, Verily I say unto you, I know you not.
13 Watch therefore; for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh.

Lesson XXXIX Continued

Verse 1.

This parable also stresses being prepared continually for the coming of the Bridegroom, Jesus. As the "virgins" were pledged to be ready for the bridegroom, so also all those who profess Christ should also feel the obligation to remain ready. The inherent reason is that at a certain time, the door will be shut, and no more opportunity to get ready.

According to Jewish tradition, and the general description of these young girls, it can be assumed that this was the home of the groom (or his parents). Also that the bride and these attendants (or "bridesmaids") as well as all other preparations have been completed. All that remained was for the bridegroom to arrive. There is no explanation as to why the number of girls was 10, nor is an explanation necessary for the lesson. They have lamps, oil containers, with wicks that would be held up to light the way.

Verses 2-4.

Five were foolish and took their lamps with them but took no oil. The sensible ones took oil in their vessels with their lamps. The ten intend to meet the bridegroom and escort him to the festivities. All have lamps. All expect him before daybreak though the actual time is unknown. That the 5 took no oil brings the designation "foolish" They were thoughtless, unprepared, without the obvious necessity. The others were the opposite, therefore wise, prepared, thoughtful.

Verse 5.

Because of the delay, they all fell asleep. They waited expectantly for some time, then experienced exhaustion, and fell asleep. This was natural.

Verse 6.

At midnight there was a shout, "Here comes the bridegroom! Go out to meet him!" Someone was watching, or part of the bridegroom's party announced his arrival.

Verses 7,8.

The foolish girls awoke, trimmed their lamps, but their wicks burned what oil was within the wick. Then, when their lamps began going out, asked the others to share their oil. The five wise girls' lamps will continue burning and be taken outside to light the way for the bridegroom.

Verse 9.

The sensible girls responded that they needed all they had. They must go out to greet the bridegroom and escort him to the home with their lamps working properly to continually light the way. They had

Lesson XXXIX Continued

prepared for their need. The others were advised to try to go buy some - though at that time of night it was highly unlikely.

Verse 10.

So the foolish ones left to try to buy some oil. It was then that the bridegroom arrived. The ready ones went in with him and the door was shut. The others were shut out.

Verses 11,12.

When the foolish ones return and try to get in, the bridegroom declares solemnly that he does not know them. They are not numbered among the converted, therefore they are not His own. Readiness means surrendered lives of love and fellowship. The foolish had only the appearance without the substance. They put forward outward membership without change of heart and life, faith in Christ.

Verse 13.

The sensible ones have true faith and trust in Christ as their Savior. The foolish have the outward form without the inward conviction. The "oil" strongly suggests the presence of the Holy Spirit. Those with His presence would be ready to greet the Bridegroom.

Matthew 25:14-30. Parable of the Talents.

14 ¶ For the kingdom of heaven is as a man traveling into a far country, who called his own servants, and delivered unto them his goods.

15 And unto one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one; to every man according to his several ability; and straightway took his journey.

16 Then he that had received the five talents went and traded with the same, and made them other five talents.

17 And likewise he that had received two, he also gained other two.

18 But he that had received one went and digged in the earth, and hid his lord's money.

19 After a long time the lord of those servants cometh, and reckoneth with them.

20 And so he that had received five talents came and brought other five talents, saying, Lord, thou deliveredst unto me five talents: behold, I have gained beside them five talents more.

21 His lord said unto him, Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord.

22 He also that had received two talents came and said, Lord, thou deliveredst unto me two talents: behold, I have gained two other talents beside them.

Lesson XXXIX Continued

23 His lord said unto him, Well done, good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord.

24 Then he which had received the one talent came and said, Lord, I knew thee that thou art a hard man, reaping where thou hast not sown, and gathering where thou hast not strewed:

25 and I was afraid, and went and hid thy talent in the earth: lo, there thou hast that is thine.

26 His lord answered and said unto him, Thou wicked and slothful servant, thou knewest that I reap where I sowed not, and gather where I have not strewed:

27 thou oughtest therefore to have put my money to the exchangers, and then at my coming I should have received mine own with usury.

28 Take therefore the talent from him, and give it unto him which hath ten talents.

29 For unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance: but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath.

30 And cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Three parts: 1.) A businessman, before taking a trip, distributed his property among his servants (employees). 2.) The different uses of each man. 3.) The evaluation of each servant upon the boss's return.

Verses 14,15.

Before his journey, the boss entrusts a sum of money to each employee according to each's ability. Then he left.

The 'talent' referred to a coin - different value given at different times and places. It was a large amount: about 6,000 times the average daily wage for common labor. The businessman wanted his money to make a profit in his absence. He also has apprised the different abilities of his workers, giving one five, another 2, and the third, one.

Verses 16,17.

The results: the one with five earned five more. The one with two earned two more. Each used the money entrusted to them to earn double.

Verse 18.

The third man, who received one talent, went off, dug a hole in the ground, and hid his boss's money. It was not unusual for treasure to be buried in the ground. The motive here was unusual in that it was not his. Apparently he chose not to invest the money and try to earn a profit. His motives will be revealed later.

Lesson XXXIX Continued

Verse 19.

A long time elapses, then the boss returns and came to settle accounts. All the employees knew this day would come, and they would be held responsible.

Verses 20-23.

The one entrusted with 5 came forward and produced the original 5 and an additional 5 talents. He was praised as good and faithful. Having been faithful over a small amount, he was to be put in charge of a greater amount. He is also to share his boss's happiness.

Next, the one who had been given two came forward with two additional talents. He receives the same commendation as the first employee - good and faithful, given more responsibility, and the boss's happiness. The first man had asked the boss to look at what he has done, to take special notice of the additional amount he has gained. The boss is very pleased saying, "Excellent!" He has proven to be resourceful and reliable. The next employee has a similar experience as the first.

Verses 24,25.

Then the time came for the third employee to make account for the one talent he had been entrusted with. Certainly the boss expects a similar profit to his investment here also.

This man begins by giving excuses and blaming his boss for his lack of motivation. He accuses him of being hard - that he was unfair and cruel. The figures of reaping where he did not sow, and gathering where he did scatter seed exemplify this idea. He feels that this gives him the excuse to fear what the boss would do if he lost the money, or didn't gain another talent. He feels what he did was logical and in his own best interest - to return what he had been entrusted with - the one talent.

Verse 26,27.

The boss's response is unhappy, calling him wicked and lazy. If the man really believed he was so 'hard', he should have worked hard to get some profit - at least bank interest. The accusation of wickedness and laziness often go together: pernicious and unambitious. The other two had been busy at work. The other dug a hole.

Verses 28-30.

The lesson: the talent was taken from the third man and given to the one with 10. Everyone who has, shall be given more, and plenty. However, from he who does not really have, what he thinks he has shall be taken away. This was an order given and carried out.

The point relates to the gifts and opportunities for serving God and what each person does with them. The more effort given brings

Lesson XXXIX Continued

more opportunities. Also more rewards shall be received. However, as for those who have never given of themselves (not using any opportunity to reach out and help others), what little talent or abilities they have will be taken away. There is also punishment. The servant is judged useless and the only alternative is the place of the most distant darkness where there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

What we are and what we possess are God's property for our use. We are to use them for God's glory, spreading the Gospel, helping others. Whatever gifts and opportunities we are given must be used to God's glory. Everything should be done, recognizing the coming time of accounting. To the faithful will be given increased responsibility in the world to come, and the joy of the eternal state hereafter. Amen.

Lesson XL

Matthew 25:31-46. The Second Coming in Glory, the Judgment of All Nations.

31 ¶ When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory:
32 and before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats:
33 and he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left.
34 Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world:
35 for I was ahungered, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in:
36 naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me.
37 Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee ahungered, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink?
38 When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee?
39 Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee?
40 And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.
41 Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels:
42 for I was ahungered, and ye gave me no meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink:
43 I was a stranger, and ye took me not in: naked, and ye clothed me not: sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not.
44 Then shall they also answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee ahungered, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto thee?
45 Then shall he answer them, saying, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me.
46 And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal.

Verse 31.

The Son of Man comes in glory with angels. He sits upon a glorious throne. This is a throne of Judgment of the King of Kings. The angels are there to carry out the judgments. They will gather the wicked and cast them into the lake of fire. They will also gather the saved ones from the four winds to enter the Millennial Kingdom.

Lesson XL Continued

Verse 32.

This is the gathering of all those still alive on earth at Christ's return to earth. All nations means the gathering of people from every nation on earth, therefore everyone. They will be judged as believers in Jesus Christ as Savior, or not believers. This is to be similar to a shepherd separating the sheep from the goats at the end of the day.

Verse 33.

The sheep would recognize His Name and come. So also those who trust in Jesus recognize His call and respond. The goats do not respond, having chosen their own way. The sheep are put on one side (His right). The goats are put on the left side.

Verse 34.

Then the king will welcome those blessed of the Father, to enter the kingdom prepared for them since the founding of the world. This is a close and lasting fellowship with their Savior and Judge and king. There is no condemnation, only blessing. They will enter the Millennial kingdom as prepared for by God. That this was planned from the foundation of the world for them means they were chosen. Their good deeds, as next enumerated, were the fruit of God's grace and not the basis of God's grace.

Verses 35,36.

Jesus now gives examples of such fruit: works of love, mercy, and generosity. Hungry - food, thirsty - drink, need of clothes - clothing, stranger - hospitality, sick - looked after, in prison - visited. Jesus says "me" six times. Each need was dealt with positively, as things natural to daily life. Those were evidence of he natural, daily, response of these people as the fruit of true disciples of Christ.

Verses 37-39.

The natural and unpretentious response of these faithful followers shows the sincerity of their lives. They question Jesus as to when they saw Him in the various conditions of need. They had not evaluated their actions so highly or even remembered them. They had done them without forethought, or any ulterior motives. They were unprepared for such praise. They are here called "righteous". They had not consciously done anything for reward. They had acted spontaneously in grateful and humble response to the salvation they had received through Christ's sacrifice on the Cross.

Verse 40.

The response of the King is to explain that their deeds to even the least of their brothers (fellow Christians) were accounted

Lesson XL Continued

as having been done for Him. That He mentions "even for the least," indicates the value of every believer.

Some have suggested that all believers were previously taken from Earth in the Rapture that the "brothers" mentioned here could only mean Christ's fellow Jews. Therefore only those who had treated the Jews kindly would be allowed to enter into the Millennium with Christ as the King of the Jewish Nation and all of its promised fulfillments of the covenants with Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and David. Why these people could not be believers in Christ is not mentioned.

Verse 41.

Now He deals with those on the left. They are called "accursed ones". They are told to depart into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels. This is the eternal punishment of the wicked, all those in association with the devil and his angels. A place of everlasting fire and outer darkness. The torment is of separation. They will know that it was their own choice to reject the grace and mercy of God in the offer of salvation through His Son, Jesus the Christ. There is unquenchable flame. There is impenetrable darkness and gloom.

Verses 42,43.

Why the wicked are condemned is laid out. The same conditions are stated, then "you did not." It should be noted that these are sins of omission: what was not done, which should have been. No theft idolatry, murder, adultery, etc.

The wicked now also ask, when did they see Jesus as hungry or a stranger, sick or in prison, and they didn't take care of Him.

Before, the righteous were astonished that they had rendered service so naturally that it was forgotten. The wicked are astonished, thinking of themselves as righteous, or deluded by their selfishness.

Verse 45.

Christ will answer them, solemnly assuring them that what they hadn't done for one of the least of these, they did not do for Him. Mistreating or not treating well, anyone that belonged to Christ, is considered as treating Christ in that same way.

Verse 46.

Their fate will be everlasting punishment. The righteous will have everlasting life.

Matthew's record of Christ's last discourse (of the total six) now ends.

Lesson XL Continued

Matthew 26:1-5. Prediction of Crucifixion.

1 And it came to pass, when Jesus had finished all these sayings, he said unto his disciples,
2 Ye know that after two days is the feast of the passover, and the Son of man is betrayed to be crucified.
3 ¶ Then assembled together the chief priests, and the scribes, and the elders of the people, unto the palace of the high priest, who was called Cai'aphas,
4 and consulted that they might take Jesus by subtilty, and kill him.
5 But they said, Not on the feast day, lest there be an uproar among the people.

After the previous explanation of future judgment, Jesus turns to events close at hand.

Verses 1,2.

He states that the Passover lamb is to be eaten on the coming Thursday (14th of Nisan), that is after two days. Jesus had already predicted His crucifixion to the disciples more than twice. Here he tells them on what day (Friday) the crucifixion will take place. That will be when He is handed over. This also indicates God's plan and His agreement to "lay down" His life for the salvation of mankind. The whole purpose of the Passover was to point to the sacrifice of Jesus as the Lamb of God. The Jewish Leaders were going to try to plan for Jesus' death - but not during the Passover Festival for fear of a riot.

Verses 3-5.

Several aspects of Jesus' ministry had aroused jealousy and envy as well as threats to their leadership and authority over the people, to the chief priests and elders of the people. Their response was to meet in the high priest's palace and plot by some trick to arrest Jesus and get Him put to death.

The miracles, the raising of Lazarus, the Triumphal entry, the cleansing of the Temple, the pointed parables against them, all added to the perceived need to get rid of Jesus.

The plot was not new. To plan to actually carry it out was now seen as necessary. The presiding officer, high priest, was Caiaphas. He had been appointed high priest by Gratus, predecessor of Pontius Pilate, in the year 18 A.D. He was son in law of Annas - the previous high priest. He may be described as sly, manipulative, and looking out for his own best interests. The meeting very likely also included scribes. The plot to eliminate Jesus was by this time of long-standing (Matthew 12:14; 21:38; cf. John 5:18; 7:1,19,25; 8:37,40). They now agree to take Jesus by surprise and by trickery. That this meeting was held at the high priest's palace would make it

Lesson XL Continued

more away from the public eye. Meetings were not allowed within the temple complex at night.

There would be thousands of Galilean pilgrims in the city of Jerusalem for the Passover. That many would be followers of Jesus led to these leaders to plan to wait until they had left the city to act. The unexpected offer of betrayal by Judas would change their plans.

Matthew 26:6-13. Anointing at Bethany.

6 ¶ Now when Jesus was in Bethany, in the house of Simon the leper,
7 there came unto him a woman having an alabaster box of very precious ointment, and poured it on his head, as he sat at meat.
8 But when his disciples saw it, they had indignation, saying, To what purpose is this waste?

9 For this ointment might have been sold for much, and given to the poor.

10 When Jesus understood it, he said unto them, Why trouble ye the woman? for she hath wrought a good work upon me.

11 For ye have the poor always with you; but me ye have not always.

12 For in that she hath poured this ointment on my body, she did it for my burial.

13 Verily I say unto you, Wheresoever this gospel shall be preached in the whole world, there shall also this, that this woman hath done, be told for a memorial of her.

Verses 6,7. (John 12:1.)

This event takes place on the preceding Saturday evening. A supper was given at Bethany in honor of Jesus. At least 15 men were there - Jesus, the 12 disciples, Lazarus (John 12:2) and one Simon who is identified as having been a leper healed by Jesus. It was his home where the banquet was held. John mentions that Martha was serving (John 12:2), the sister of Mary and Lazarus. Jesus reclined at the table, as was the custom. A woman comes to Him. John identifies her as Mary. She holds in her hands an alabaster jar of costly perfume from pure nard, about 12 oz. She breaks the jar of soft stone and pours the fragrant contents over Jesus.

Matthew and Mark describe its pouring over Christ's body. The amount would allow its spread over His entire body, down to His feet. The breaking of the container would obviously allow its rapid pouring out. Then the reaction of the disciples.

Verses 8,9.

John mentions that it was the treasurer of the disciples, Judas Iscariot, who made the strongest protest. The calculated value was 300 denarii - if it had been sold, the money could have been given to the poor. Matthew and Mark described the other disciples as agreeing to this sentiment.

Lesson XL Continued

Verses 10,11.

Jesus had to point out to His disciples the misguided way they were thinking. They must only look at what this believing woman had done for Him. There would always be opportunities for believers to share and benefit the poor. There was only a very limited time for anyone to show Him special consideration and honor. How special this act was Jesus is about to reveal.

Verse 12.

Jesus is saying that Mary, whether consciously aware of it or not, had anointed Jesus for His soon coming death and burial. It was Luke who recorded that she also anointed His feet and wiped them with her hair (Luke 10:39).

Verse 13.

Jesus promises that this act of generosity and kindness would be told wherever the gospel is preached in the whole world.

Matthew 26:14-16. Judas Plots with the Chief Priests.

14 ¶ Then one of the twelve, called Judas Iscar'i-ot, went unto the chief priests,
15 and said unto them, What will ye give me, and I will deliver him unto you? And they covenanted with him for thirty pieces of silver.
16 And from that time he sought opportunity to betray him.

Verses 14,15.

It can be surmised that the most likely time this occurred was after the Tuesday meeting of the Sanhedrin (after the Saturday evening supper of verses 6-13). The tragedy of one of the disciples betraying Jesus is not explained, only the transaction. As the leaders were looking for a way to get rid of Jesus, here comes one of His close disciples volunteering to hand Him over to them. His reward was only thirty pieces of silver. They counted it out for him. He would not dare go back after having been paid. This was a fulfillment of Zechariah 11:12,13. The value of the pieces of silver has been approximated to be \$20.00.

Verse 16.

From then on, he was looking for an opportunity to hand Him over. This was to come soon, and at the appropriate time.

Matthew 26:17-25. Passover.

17 ¶ Now the first day of the feast of unleavened bread the disciples came to Jesus, saying unto him, Where wilt thou that we prepare for thee to eat the passover?

Lesson XL Continued

18 And he said, Go into the city to such a man, and say unto him, The Master saith, My time is at hand; I will keep the passover at thy house with my disciples.

19 And the disciples did as Jesus had appointed them; and they made ready the passover.

20 ¶ Now when the even was come, he sat down with the twelve.

21 And as they did eat, he said, Verily I say unto you, that one of you shall betray me.

22 And they were exceeding sorrowful, and began every one of them to say unto him, Lord, is it I?

23 And he answered and said, He that dippeth his hand with me in the dish, the same shall betray me.

24 The Son of man goeth as it is written of him: but woe unto that man by whom the Son of man is betrayed! it had been good for that man if he had not been born.

25 Then Judas, which betrayed him, answered and said, Master, is it I? He said unto him, Thou hast said.

Verse 17.

The first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the disciples enquired of Jesus where they were to prepare the Passover supper to be made ready. Everything must be purchased and made ready according to Exodus 12:3. The Lamb sacrificed in the temple, unleavened bread, bitter herbs, and wine brought to the place. It must now be Thursday morning, with no time for delay.

Verse 18.

Jesus directs them to go to the city and a certain person would be carrying a pitcher of water (which was not usual for a man). They were to tell the man that the Teacher needs his upper room to celebrate the Passover with His disciples. That His time was near makes it clear that the plan of God was, as it always will be, right on schedule. (Mark 14:12-21; Luke 22:7-14, 21,23; John 13:21-30).

Verse 19.

Christ's description was carried out as He had spoken concerning the man and the place. The disciples proceeded to prepare everything for the Passover meal as Jesus had instructed them.

Verses 20,21.

This takes place after the lesson on humility of Jesus washing the disciples' feet (John 13:1-20). That evening while Jesus reclined at the table with the twelve, at a certain point during the meal, Jesus made a shocking pronouncement. He solemnly assured them that one of them was going to betray Him: "One of you!" to betray meant to hand Him over to authorities. They could not disbelieve what Jesus said, for He only spoke the truth.

Lesson XL Continued

Verse 22.

This led the disciples to question their own hearts. Could they really trust themselves to be exempt from this terrible possibility? Thus disturbed within, one by one they began to say to Jesus, "Surely not I, Lord?" The question is phrased to expected the desired negative response which they each hope for. Jesus does not immediately give them peace. He wanted it to sink in. He was the Host, they His guests, sharing His food at His table. That anyone could even think of violating His hospitality was unthinkable. This pointed to the evil character of the one, the traitor. This gave Judas an accurate picture of the seriousness of his plan and the necessary consequences. This warning also gave him a chance to change his mind - if he goes onward from here, his guilt is the greater.

Though Jesus was fully in control of the situation, it must have grieved Him that Judas could choose to betray Him. This was also a time of self-examination for the other disciples to test their own motives, their allegiance and faithfulness to their Lord.

Verse 24.

Jesus assures them that the Scriptures concerning the sacrifice of the Son of man will be fulfilled. But woe to the man who betrays Him. It would have been better for that man if he had never been born. This was to remind the disciples that He must die according to the Scriptures as the sacrifice for their sins. This went against the traditional role of Messiah believed by the Jewish people to be the conquering hero. This was actually based on the Scriptures of Christ's Second Coming. When He is killed, the disciples must think back to these words and realize that all was according to God's plan.

Even so, man's responsibility remains. He had, at every point, a chance to change his mind and not go through with the plot, especially here at Christ's direct warning: his damnation would be eternal woe.

Verse 25.

Judas, who was in the very process of betraying Him, having the 30 pieces of silver on his person, has the nerve to also ask, "Surely not I, Rabbi?" Apparently he feels it was necessary to imitate the others, otherwise he would stick out and questions would be raised. Perhaps he also thought that Jesus did not really know. Notice that he did not say "Lord" as the others did, but the lesser title of "Rabbi".

Jesus then said to him, "You said it!" In other words, "Yes". John adds that Jesus then said to him to go ahead and hurry up with his plans (John 13:27). He rushes out of the room, satan in his heart, into the night. (John 13:30.)

Lesson XLI

Matthew 26:26-30. The Lord's Supper.

26 ¶ And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and brake it, and gave it to the disciples, and said, Take, eat; this is my body.

27 And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it;

28 for this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.

29 But I say unto you, I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom.

30 ¶ And when they had sung a hymn, they went out into the mount of Olives.

The Passover becomes the Lord's Supper.

Verse 26.

A few more hours and the symbol of the bloody sacrifice of a lamb will have served its purpose unto the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross, once and for all. The new symbols must not require shedding of blood, but must represent it. Both are to point to Him. The Lord's Supper must point back to His sacrifice as the Passover pointed forward to it.

Jesus took a piece of thing, flat unleavened bread, gave thanks, and started breaking it into pieces. He gave a piece to each of His disciples, telling them that this bread represented His body, which was to be broken for them. He was taking their place, and dying the death they deserved, that they may live unto God.

Verses 27,28.

Then He took the cup and gave thanks. He gave it to all, saying to drink. This represented the blood of the new covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.

This was to be practiced in loving remembrance of His sacrifice until he returns. This includes thinking about the depth and breadth of His sacrifice, accepting it personally by faith, and keeping Him in remembrance, in living daily hope, watching for His return in glory.

The stress remains on the wine as it represents Christ's spilt blood not on the vessel (chalice or cup). Each believer is to partake of the wine, as of the bread. Reconciliation with God always requires the shedding of blood (from Exodus 24:8, Leviticus 17:11, to the New Testament - Hebrews 9:22 and Ephesians 1:7). This was required because of man's sin.

This is another prediction of His soon coming death on the cross. He also instructs them to keep this practice until His return.

Lesson XLI Continued

Verse 29.

This fruit of the vine was certainly fermented grape juice, the kind of wine used at Passover. He therefore is not only pointing backward to His sacrifice in the Communion, but also forward to the time that He will be celebrating with His church in the kingdom given unto Him by the Father, an everlasting kingdom.

Verse 30.

The custom was at the close of the Passover to sing hymns, most likely Psalms 115-118. These were of praise and thanksgiving and trusting in God.

Then they went out, crossing the brook, Kedron, and entered the garden grove called Gethsemane. It is located near the foot of the Mount of Olives.

Matthew 26:31-35. Peter's Denial Foretold.

31 Then saith Jesus unto them, All ye shall be offended because of me this night: for it is written, I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered abroad.

32 But after I am risen again, I will go before you into Galilee.

33 Peter answered and said unto him, Though all men shall be offended because of thee, yet will I never be offended.

34 Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, That this night, before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice.

35 Peter said unto him, Though I should die with thee, yet will I not deny thee. Likewise also said all the disciples.

"Then" indicates a lapse of time, this discourse happening after leaving the Upper Room, on the way to Gethsemane. Perhaps towards 11 in the evening. This very night all of them would be untrue to their Lord. As sheep of the flock scatter when the shepherd is struck down. This fulfills the prophecy of Zechariah 13:1. It was God the Father who "spared not His own Son" (Romans 8:32). It was Jehovah who laid upon Him the iniquities of us all (Isaiah 53:6). They were going to go in every direction - but they would also come together. When this happened, they would realize that Jesus had forewarned them of this also.

Verse 32.

The prediction of the Resurrection, and His meeting with them again in Galilee. This given before they are scattered; they are promised a regathering and His own appearance with them in their home region, and His also. This among Christ's predictions did also come to pass (John 21:1-23; I Corinthians 15:6).

Lesson XLI Continued

Verse 33.

Peter now reacts to what Jesus had said previously (verse 31). He claims that though all the others may become untrue, he will never do so. That he believed this at the time is not questioned. What is questioned is his knowledge of his own weaknesses. First he questions what Christ said - that it could not be true of him. Second, he places himself above his fellows as though he could believe their becoming untrue but not himself. Third, this was a swelling of his pride; he was certainly better than all the rest.

Verse 34.

This was a character flaw that Jesus must bring to Peter's attention in the most forceful way He must be brought low to face his true weakness, and grievous sin. Jesus solemnly declares to him, that on that very night, before the cock crows, he shall deny Him three times. It was to happen before dawn. Three times he will be accused of being Jesus' follower, and three times he will deny it.

This shows the prophetic office of Christ - the detail of three times and before morning (marked by the crowing of a rooster). This will also serve to shock Peter's mind into the stark realization of what he had done, and that Jesus had known ahead of time, and will bring Peter to deep and profound repentance.

Verse 35.

Peter can at this time only continue to boast to the extent that he is prepared to die with Christ rather than deny Him. The other disciples also spoke in a similar loyal fashion.

In Luke's Gospel we have the details that Jesus had prayed especially for Peter (Luke 22:31,32), and that He gave Peter a knowing look (Luke 24:34), and finally, a public restoration (John 21:15-17).

Matthew 26:36-46. Gethsemane.

36 ¶ Then cometh Jesus with them unto a place called Gethsem'ane, and saith unto the disciples, Sit ye here, while I go and pray yonder.

37 And he took with him Peter and the two sons of Zeb'edee, and began to be sorrowful and very heavy.

38 Then saith he unto them, My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death: tarry ye here, and watch with me.

39 And he went a little further, and fell on his face, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt.

40 And he cometh unto the disciples, and findeth them asleep, and saith unto Peter, What, could ye not watch with me one hour?

41 Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.

Lesson XLI Continued

42 He went away again the second time, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if this cup may not pass away from me, except I drink it, thy will be done.

43 And he came and found them asleep again: for their eyes were heavy.

44 And he left them, and went away again, and prayed the third time, saying the same words.

45 Then cometh he to his disciples, and saith unto them, Sleep on now, and take your rest: behold, the hour is at hand, and the Son of man is betrayed into the hands of sinners.

46 Rise, let us be going: behold, he is at hand that doth betray me.

Verse 36.

Jesus and His disciples traveled to a place called Gethsemane. This was out of the eastern gate of the city, north of the Temple. The road crossed the brook called Kedron on to the Mount of Olives. There an enclosed grove of olive trees was called the Garden of Gethsemane. There was also perhaps an olive press. It is likely that permission had been obtained from the owner, since Jesus and His disciples went there often, and spent the night. It was private, secluded, quiet.

He suggests that the disciples sit and rest somewhat near the entrance, while He would go further in to pray.

Verse 37.

He leaves the 8, taking Peter and the two sons of Zebedee with Him. Rest was needed by all and it was late. That Jesus took Peter with the other two after his recent boasting shows Jesus' concern and forgiving love. This also shows that Jesus needed human companionship.

It was then that the coming events began to overpower His human soul. He began to be filled with sorrow and anguish. To face the bearing of the sins of all mankind, the pain, suffering, and forsakenness of that final sacrifice where even the Father would turn away from Him, must have been overwhelming. This plus the betrayal, hatred, accusations, condemnation of the religious leaders, cruelty of the soldiers and Pilate, the crucifixion itself - to contemplate all this at once is unimaginable.

Verse 38.

He expressed His being overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. He asked them to stay with Him and remain awake with Him. This feeling would not leave Him until He, on the cross, could say, "It is finished."

He faced the thought of stopping. To face sorrow to the point of death means that death would be better than continuing the path of unalterable suffering. Yet He, at every point, chose to continue on

Lesson XLI Continued

the path to the cross, and our salvation. That dedication and love is unfathomable to mankind, selfish and sinful as we are. This demands our continual and undying thankfulness and faithful gratitude for our entire lives, here and hereafter.

Verse 39.

The agony becomes more intense. He goes a little farther into the center of the garden, and threw Himself face down to the ground in prayer to His Father. He has left the three some small distance behind.

He says, "O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt." The cup relates to the task of being mankind's Savior and all that it entails. Jesus asks if it is possible He wishes to be spared. But He closes with complete submission to the will of the Father. Luke records that an angel from heaven came to strengthen Him (Luke 22:43). This was in answer to His prayer. He was given the strength to take this cup and drink its entire contents. That He as the sinless sacrifice made His suffering all-sufficient, of infinite value, to pay the price for the sins of all humanity.

Verse 40.

It was undoubtedly past midnight by this time, on this uniquely eventful night. Jesus expresses a gentle rebuke, that the disciples, especially Peter, were unable to stay awake with Him a single hour.

Verse 41.

Jesus continues: "Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation..." They are admonished to watch over their spiritual decisions, according to their faith and experience with Him. They were not able to do this. Jesus adds "the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." In this particular night Jesus had felt the extreme need of prayer for strength, so much more the disciples need strength to withstand the coming temptation. Human nature is so tied to the flesh, and weak toward the call of the spirit, but strong was the pull of self-interest and preservation of self. The disciples in their spirits were eager to remain alert and on guard, but because of the weakness of the flesh, they were not able to do so.

Verse 42.

The second time, Jesus went away and prayed to the Father that this cup of suffering might pass from Him, and again bowed to the Father's will. The emphasis here is "Thy will be done." This plainly states that the foremost duty of the Son of God is obedience, even to the death on the cross.

Lesson XLI Continued

Verses 43.

Whatever their deepest desires the disciples were unable to remain awake. "And he came and found them asleep again: for their eyes were heavy." None, even the select three, were able to stay awake, watch and pray with Jesus.

Verse 44.

Again, by Himself, Jesus was alone in praying to the Father. His deepest concerns, which ended in His dedication and choice to fulfill the will of the Father.

Verse 45a.

Then He comes to the disciples and says to them, "Sleep on now, and take your rest..." Jesus began by asking His disciples to stay awake and watch with Him, now is compassionately watching over them. He has faced His fears and won the victory. He has reaffirmed His commitment to the Father's will and been strengthened through prayer. Though they fail Him, He never fails them. The time between these words and the next is unknown, but it is a short duration. At some pointer later Jesus could see the lights of the approaching band of men. He then knows that the disciples must be aroused.

Verse 45b.

"Behold, the hour is at hand, and the Son of man is betrayed into the hands of sinners." "Behold" means "look", pay attention to what's happening. The betrayer is here with those he betrayed Him to.

Verse 46.

"Rise, let us be going: behold, he is at hand that doth betray me." Rather than waking them up in fear, and to run away, Jesus is going to go out of the garden to meet them. He knew who it was, and why they had come. He chose to go to them and follow the path to the cross, as He knew as the central purpose of His incarnation. It was as if He was eager to fulfill the task the Father had given Him to do. Next, the arrest.

Lesson XLII

Matthew 26:47-56. Betrayal and Arrest.

47 ¶ And while he yet spake, lo, Judas, one of the twelve, came, and with him a great multitude with swords and staves, from the chief priests and elders of the people.

48 Now he that betrayed him gave them a sign, saying, Whomsoever I shall kiss, that same is he; hold him fast.

49 And forthwith he came to Jesus, and said, Hail, Master; and kissed him.

50 And Jesus said unto him, Friend, wherefore art thou come? Then came they, and laid hands on Jesus, and took him.

51 And, behold, one of them which were with Jesus stretched out his hand, and drew his sword, and struck a servant of the high priest, and smote off his ear.

52 Then said Jesus unto him, Put up again thy sword into his place: for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword.

53 Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels?

54 But how then shall the Scriptures be fulfilled, that thus it must be?

55 In that same hour said Jesus to the multitudes, Are ye come out as against a thief with swords and staves for to take me? I sat daily with you teaching in the temple, and ye laid no hold on me.

56 But all this was done, that the Scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled. Then all the disciples forsook him, and fled.

Verse 47.

While Jesus arouses the disciples and goes ahead of them out of the garden, the approaching crowd arrives. Judas is in the lead. He had promised to specifically identify Jesus at a time and place that would be secret and private. This was in a remote area, late in the night, in the dark, where no one would be aware, or observe what was being done. A group of temple police, as well as a group of Roman soldiers had been gathered. Members of the high priest's class and of the Sanhedrin were also in the group. Lanterns, clubs, and swords were made ready and assembled. Judas was correct that Jesus and the disciples had returned to this garden as they had often done before.

It had been agreed that Judas would step forward and identify Jesus personally by greeting him with the kiss of respect, a tradition still practiced by many cultures. The temple police (including Malchus the high priest's servant) must have been right behind him, with the Romans and others bringing up the rear.

It can be assumed that the Temple police carried clubs, while the swords were carried by the Roman soldiers. This was an amount of force the leaders felt was necessary to arrest and bring Jesus to them for trial.

That there were "torches and lanterns" at a time when the

Lesson XLII Continued

moon was full indicates that these would be necessary to search for someone that would be trying to hide in the shadows of the olive grove. "Overkill" comes to mind. Jesus went out to meet them. They were prepared to seek out and forcefully arrest a criminal, a revolutionary, a trouble-maker, accused of wanting to overthrow the Roman oppression. This was in spite of the fact that there was absolutely no evidence to this effect, in Jesus' words or actions. In fact, all Jesus said and did exemplified the very opposite.

Verses 48,49.

The group had been told that the one Judas singled out and kissed, they were to grab. At the moment the group arrived, and Jesus went forward, Judas went up to Jesus and said, "Hello, Rabbi" and kissed him dramatically, so that there would be no doubt. This prearranged sign, the greeting of friendship and affection, was the one they must grab, bind, and arrest.

Verse 50.

Jesus (according to Luke 22:48) questions Judas, as friend - is he betraying Him with a kiss? This also lets Judas know that Jesus knew the greeting was the sign of betrayal, and that He came forward to accept and face this event knowingly, and by choice, even recognizing the ensuing events. This was another warning to Judas, where again he has a choice. He chooses to proceed with the arrest.

The soldiers, with the Temple guards, laid hands on Jesus, bound Him, and arrested Him. John 10:11 makes it clear that His arrest was completely voluntary. He had the power to stop it if He chose to.

Verse 51.

Peter is not named (though he is mentioned in the later Gospel of John) as the disciple who drew a sword and cut off the ear of the high priest's servant Malchus). Possibly bold because of his previous boasting, Peter attacked. Malchus obviously ducked, turning his head, thus only his ear was severed. Luke 22:51 records the healing of the ear. Matthew records the words of Jesus in reaction to such a bold and violent move, which was completely unacceptable.

Verses 52-54.

Jesus admonished Peter to put the sword away, then the statement: "for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword." This was not Peter's role, nor should it be for any Christian. Jesus explains that if force or fighting was the way to conquer man's sin, then He could call on His Father for 12 legions of angels to destroy this present threat. But that was never the point. His mission could not be fulfilled in that way. The prophecies concerning the Savior, the Lamb of God, must be fulfilled. Otherwise man would have no way of reconciliation with God.

Lesson XLII Continued

Verse 55.

Jesus then spoke to all those assembled against Him. He wants them to think about what they were doing, contrasted with what He had done. He had been teaching peace and love, forgiveness and reconciliation with God, daily in the Temple. Now look how they had come after Him, like He was a criminal, a thief. They had come with serious weapons, as if they thought they would have to use them, to force Him to come with them. He actually had come forward, showing Himself to them. They did not need the lanterns and torches to search for Him hiding in the shadows.

Even members of the Sanhedrin were there (Luke 22:52). If He had really been guilty of any crime whatsoever, these men had ample opportunity every day as He had been sitting in the Temple teaching the people. That this action was committed during the night proved the cowardice of their sinister plot against Him.

By speaking thus to all present, He was exposing them to the true sin of their action, and again forcing them to choose, but with an opportunity to repent and turn to faith in Him, recognizing the truth of what He said as the Truth.

Verse 56.

His final word acknowledges that even this unlawful arrest was a necessary part of the Scriptures which the prophets wrote of the Suffering Servant. They must be fulfilled in every point and this was one of them. Had this not been so, these men could have had no success at all. Then the disciples left Him, and fled.

As Jesus had foretold (in verse 31). The Shepherd had been taken; the sheep fled. Fear and the instinct for self-preservation took over. This was weakness, temptation, and sin. They were only human after all. What would any of us have done in the same circumstance!

Matthew 26:57-68. The Trial Before the Sanhedrin.

57 ¶ And they that had laid hold on Jesus led him away to Cai'aphas the high priest, where the scribes and the elders were assembled.
 58 But Peter followed him afar off unto the high priest's palace, and went in, and sat with the servants, to see the end.
 59 Now the chief priests, and elders, and all the council, sought false witness against Jesus, to put him to death;
 60 but found none: yea, though many false witnesses came, yet found they none. At the last came two false witnesses,
 61 and said, This fellow said, I am able to destroy the temple of God, and to build it in three days.
 62 And the high priest arose, and said unto him, Answerest thou nothing? what is it which these witness against thee?
 63 But Jesus held his peace. And the high priest answered and said

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unto him, I adjure thee by the living God, that thou tell us whether thou be the Christ, the Son of God.

64 Jesus saith unto him, Thou hast said: nevertheless I say unto you, Hereafter shall ye see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven.

65 Then the high priest rent his clothes, saying, He hath spoken blasphemy; what further need have we of witnesses? behold, now ye have heard his blasphemy.

66 What think ye? They answered and said, He is guilty of death.

67 Then did they spit in his face, and buffeted him; and others smote him with the palms of their hands,

68 saying, Prophecy unto us, thou Christ, Who is he that smote thee?

Jesus was to go through both the religious (ecclesiastical) and civil (Roman government) trials. Each had three stages. Of the first: 1.) The preliminary hearing before Annas (only in John 18:12-14; 19-23). 2.) The illegal trial before a group of the Sanhedrin before dawn. 3.) The lawful trial before the complete Sanhedrin (the high priest, scribes, and elders).

In the civil: 1.) Initial trial before Pilate. 2.) That held by Herod (only recorded by Luke in 23:6-12). 3.) The final hearing before Pilate.

Verse 57.

This begins after the preliminary hearing before Annas (previous high priest and Father-in-law to the present high priest Caiaphas).

Jesus was taken before the assembled scribes and elders and Caiaphas the high priest. This was not a regular meeting, but one called during the night for the single purpose of condemning Jesus to death. That it was held in the high priest's palace was to keep it private and secret. The normal meetings of the Sanhedrin were held in a great hall, part of the Temple complex. These were public and not allowed to be held at night.

Verse 58.

From a considerable distance, Peter followed Jesus until he came to the courtyard of the high priest. Once in the courtyard, he sat down with the Temple officers to wait and see what would happen.

John 18:15, 16, describes how Peter gained entrance into the compound. By this time the Roman soldiers would have returned to their barracks at the fortress of Antonia, having completed their task. The palace servants and the Temple guards, having turned over their prisoner gathered in the open courtyard to warm themselves over a fire. This sets the stage for Peter's denials which would occur later.

Lesson XLII Continued

Verses 59,60a.

Matthew turns to the Trial. The chief priests and all the Sanhedrin now assembled had one purpose: namely to find any false testimony against Jesus that would allow them to demand Jesus be put to death. Though many false witnesses did come forward, none had strong enough testimony nor did any two agree strongly enough for the purpose. By Jewish law two witnesses had to agree for a conviction to be legal.

To sentence Jesus to death and expect the Jewish people to accept that verdict, there had be to just cause. So also for the Romans since they only had the authority to carry out a death sentence.

It was a great condemnation of the nature of sinful men that they presumed to judge and condemn the Sinless One. There never was any intent to give Jesus a fair hearing, or follow rules according to reliable witnesses or the laws of evidence.

In fact, many Jewish laws were violated:

- 1.) Night trials were illegal.
- 2.) There were not to be any executions during the Feast or Passover (or any other).
- 3.) No case could be begun on the day before a Feast.
- 4.) No conviction was allowed at night.
- 5.) No execution was allowed during a Feast.
- 6.) To arrest someone as the result of a bribe was illegal (as Judas was paid).
- 7.) The defendant was not required to incriminate themselves (as Jesus was).
- 8.) A day was to elapse between conviction of capital punishment and the sentence to be passed, and carried out.

The explanation of Caiaphas was that all infringements upon the Law were to be stopped for the sake of the people, the religion, and the nation. The real reason was envy and the preservation of their own power and position. Jesus had exposed their "den of thieves" which showed their true worldliness and greed. They had been identified as hypocrites and posers, prideful and uncaring, outwardly righteous but inwardly full of sin. What they called a trial was really a carrying out of their secret plot. They seek false witnesses. They all condemn Him as deserving death.

Verses 60b,61.

Finally two came forward that agreed in their testimony as to something blasphemous that they had heard Jesus say: "I am able to destroy the temple of God, and to build it in three days." This quote relates to John 2:19. Jesus never claimed that He was going to destroy the Temple. They claimed this was blasphemy against God's Holy Temple.

Lesson XLII Continued

Verses 62,63a.

That Jesus remains silent upsets Caiaphas. He is presiding and expects Jesus to act as any other accused person. He gets upset to the point of getting up and demanding that Jesus answer these accusers. This is a serious charge against Him, surely He must have some defense. Jesus says not a word. This fulfills Isaiah 42:1-4; 53:7 (He opened not His mouth). This was not to the advantage of the trial proceeding.

Verse 63b.

To the crux of the matter, the high priest demands, by oath on the Living God, Jesus must state clearly whether He claims to be the Christ, the Son of God. Jesus had previously on several occasions said so: to the Samaritan woman, and when He had been called the Son of David, and said that as the Son of man He would judge all men (25:31-46). He had clearly been teaching His disciples that His messiahship was as the Suffering Servant. This was the providential opportunity to once and for all openly acknowledge His role as God's Son.

Verse 64.

Jesus replied, "You said it!" meaning that He agrees with what the man had said. He then proceeds to explain the meaning - which goes far beyond the present events, the humiliation and death, to the great glory accomplished.

From that time on He shall reappear as God's Son at God's right hand, and coming in the clouds of heaven (as in Daniel 7:13,14; Psalms 110:1). His return would be as Judge over these men who presumed to judge and condemn Him. They were warned.

Verse 65.

The high priest could not be more pleased. Jesus had done what no witnesses had succeeded in doing. Jesus had claimed He was the Son of God, the Messiah. He cannot show his joy but must exhibit great anger and sorrow that Jesus has committed such blasphemy, claiming to be God's Son, the Promised Messiah. He had even claimed to be the One who, in Daniel's prophecy, would come in the clouds of heaven, judge all nations, and have everlasting dominion (Daniel 7:13,14). Only God could make such claims. Either everything Jesus said was true, or He was a blasphemer, guilty of a death penalty (Leviticus 24:16). Only the second alternative is acceptable for the motives of Caiaphas.

Caiaphas dramatically states his conclusions to his audience: "what further need have we of witnesses? behold, now ye have heard his blasphemy."

Verse 66.

He goes on to ask the crowd what they think - obviously being

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confident that they could only agree with him. It was about 3 A.M. by this time. That a solution had appeared gave them all a way out, an end to the long campaign to get rid of this upstart, disruptor, rebel, criminal.

They answered, "He is guilty of death." This was a verdict, found guilty. According to the law, a day interval should elapse before the sentence to be passed. This group could not take that amount of time. It would be too dangerous to their purpose. It would give Jesus' followers a chance to organize a revolt, or protest on His behalf. Once it is day, the Sanhedrin would formally meet and pass sentence. To have the sentence carried out, they must convince the Roman authority to carry out the execution.

Verses 67, 68.

Jesus was then treated cruelly by the Temple police and palace guards. They spat in His face and struck Him with their fists. Others slapped Him and said that He, being the Christ, should be able to tell them who slapped Him. Mark and Luke mention that they blindfolded Him (Mark 14:65; Luke 22:64).

"He was despised and rejected by men, wounded for our transgressions, bruised for our iniquities." (Isaiah 53:3.) Jesus was true to His teaching, and prophecy was fulfilled.

Lesson XLIII

Matthew 26:69-75. Peter Denies the Lord Three Times.

69 ¶ Now Peter sat without in the palace: and a damsel came unto him, saying, Thou also wast with Jesus of Galilee.

70 But he denied before them all, saying, I know not what thou sayest.

71 And when he was gone out into the porch, another maid saw him, and said unto them that were there, This fellow was also with Jesus of Nazareth.

72 And again he denied with an oath, I do not know the man.

73 And after a while came unto him they that stood by, and said to Peter, Surely thou also art one of them; for thy speech betrayeth thee.

74 Then began he to curse and to swear, saying, I know not the man. And immediately the cock crew.

75 And Peter remembered the word of Jesus, which said unto him, Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice. And he went out, and wept bitterly.

Verse 69.

Peter's story is continued from verse 58 where he was in the courtyard. A servant girl comes up to him and simply states that he too had been with Jesus of Galilee. This was likely the gate-keeper who had admitted Peter at John's request, who she knew to be a disciple of Jesus. She was released in change of shift, and now comes to the courtyard where she observes Peter, obviously quite nervous. Luke describes her as fixing her eyes on him (22:56). She steps even closer when she makes her statement - whether accusation of guilt or not, Peter takes it as a threat and replies.

Verse 70.

Peter is taken by surprise and denies it, and claims not to know what she is talking about. The former bravado is gone. He feels threatened.

Verse 71.

The second quickly follows. Peter leaves the courtyard group and goes out near the gate. There another girl sees him and says to those gathered there that he had been with Jesus, now identified as from Nazareth. Having left the gathered guards and police, he was seeking a way out, but before he reaches the gate he is again identified as a follower of Jesus. This was most likely the girl who took the place at the gate of the girl that first pointed out Peter as Christ's follower, and let her relief know. Luke mentions a man who agrees with this (Luke 22:58).

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Verse 72.

This time Peter uses an oath, saying that he doesn't know the man. More threatened and frustrated, he uses an oath and calls Jesus "the man" as if he didn't know His name. He was not allowed to leave so he returns to the courtyard.

Verse 73.

About an hour later, those standing around the fire came up to Peter and said that certainly he is one of Christ's followers, his manner of speech gives him away as being from Galilee also. Some were talking about him, some directly to him.

Verse 74,75.

Finally Peter began calling down a curse on himself and to swear that he doesn't know the man. He again acts like he doesn't know "the man" Jesus. By saying may God do this or that to him (strike by lightning etc.) his accent was at the same time confirming his association with Christ.

At that moment a rooster crowed. This sound jarred Peter's memory of the warning that Jesus had not very long before told him. Luke (22:61) mentions that Jesus is in direct line of sight with Peter, and looks into his eyes as He was being moved across the courtyard, His trial by night having ended. This sight full of sorrow and compassion, plus the shock of the rooster's call reached Peter's heart and soul. He went outside and wept bitterly.

That the crowd was distracted by the movement of Jesus was the occasion that Peter was able to go outside of the Palace compound seems most likely. It is also likely that Peter was caught completely off-guard by his own weakness, his former boasting in contrast to his fearful denials of the One he trusts most of all. He, Who had even told him ahead of time that he would thus deny Him three times.

Matthew 27:1-10. Jesus Brought Before Pilate.

1 When the morning was come, all the chief priests and elders of the people took counsel against Jesus to put him to death:

2 and when they had bound him, they led him away, and delivered him to Pontius Pilate the governor.

3 ¶ Then Judas, which had betrayed him, when he saw that he was condemned, repented himself, and brought again the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders,

4 saying, I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood. And they said, What is that to us? see thou to that.

5 And he cast down the pieces of silver in the temple, and departed, and went and hanged himself.

6 And the chief priests took the silver pieces, and said, It is not lawful for to put them into the treasury, because it is the price of

Lesson XLIII Continued

blood.

7 And they took counsel, and bought with them the potter's field, to bury strangers in.

8 Wherefore that field was called, The field of blood, unto this day.

9 Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by Jeremiah the prophet, saying,

And they took the thirty pieces of silver,
the price of him that was valued,

whom they of the children of Israel did value;

10 and gave them for the potter's field, as the Lord appointed me.

Verse 1.

The Sanhedrin is convened soon after daybreak. The only purpose was to make official and legal the foregone verdict: guilty of blasphemy, the sentence - death. Then, Jesus must be quickly taken before Pilate to carry out the sentence before any protest can be mounted.

Verse 2.

This accomplished, Jesus was led away, again bound, and handed over to Pilate the Roman governor. Only the Romans held the right to execute the death penalty. The place was most logically the governor's hearing rooms at the fortress of Antonia where the Roman garrison of soldiers were housed (Mark 15:16). Otherwise his residence was in Caesarea.

Pontius Pilate was the 5th governor of Judea. The official title was procurator, ruler over that designated province. He was directly answerable to the emperor. He had civil, criminal, and military authority. A general picture of his character can be ascertained from the Gospel records of his words and conduct. He was proud, cruel, superstitious, and always seeking his own self-interest. He hated the Jews, and without understanding or sympathy for them. He lacked any sense of fair treatment or justice.

Verses 3,4.

At some point after Judas learned that Jesus was condemned to death, he felt remorse over his betrayal. Guilt and fear overwhelmed him. He returned the 30 pieces of silver he had been paid to the chief priest and elders (no indication that they were still in a meeting. He expresses that he has betrayed innocent blood. These leaders had no concern for this man's feelings or ethics. Whatever this man had done for them, they had no concern for him. If he had now changed his mind - that was his problem, not theirs. Their motives were furthered by him. That did not mean they respected or had any concern for such a traitor. They wanted no further dealing with him.

Lesson XLIII Continued

Verse 5.

It is implied that these men were in the Temple, at their usual place of gathering in the Temple complex. Then Judas threw the silver pieces into the Temple - suggesting that they were thrown into the sanctuary or Holy Place. Whatever his motive, it at least is clear that he felt he must return and get rid of this blood-money for the sake of his own conscience. He could no longer live with his action. He went off and hanged himself. Only God knows the true intents of this man's heart and the destination of his soul. Most Christian scholars consider this suicide as a sin, remorse - not repentance unto faith and reconciliation and salvation.

Verse 6.

The chief priests did have the ethics not to put the silver into the Temple treasury, because it was money paid for betrayal to the shedding of blood. Though they had paid this money to have Christ betrayed, so they could further their plot to have Him killed, didn't bother them. Only that the money was returned. Now they claimed scrupulous faithfulness to God's law as to the use of this "blood money".

Verse 8.

So they used it to buy a field to be used for the burial of foreigners. It became thereafter known as the Field of Blood. This was a testimony as to the source of the money. It was also suggested that this valley was also the location of Judas' death.

Verses 9,10.

Jeremiah 19 describes Judah and Jerusalem shedding innocent blood. The Chief Priests and elders were prominent. A potter is mentioned. The valley of Hinnom is mentioned, where the Potter's Field was located. It was changed in name to the Valley of Slaughter which is very close to "The Field of Blood". It becomes a well-known place of burial. The point is that the suicide of the betrayer and the purchase of this field with his blood money were also prophesied.

Matthew 27:11-26. Jesus Before Pilate - Death Sentence.

11 ¶ And Jesus stood before the governor: and the governor asked him, saying, Art thou the King of the Jews? And Jesus said unto him, Thou sayest.

12 And when he was accused of the chief priests and elders, he answered nothing.

13 Then said Pilate unto him, Hearest thou not how many things they witness against thee?

14 And he answered him to never a word; insomuch that the governor marveled greatly.

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15 ¶ Now at that feast the governor was wont to release unto the people a prisoner, whom they would.

16 And they had then a notable prisoner, called Barab'bas.

17 Therefore when they were gathered together, Pilate said unto them, Whom will ye that I release unto you? Barab'bas, or Jesus which is called Christ?

18 For he knew that for envy they had delivered him.

19 When he was set down on the judgment seat, his wife sent unto him, saying, Have thou nothing to do with that just man: for I have suffered many things this day in a dream because of him.

20 But the chief priests and elders persuaded the multitude that they should ask Barab'bas, and destroy Jesus.

21 The governor answered and said unto them, Whether of the twain will ye that I release unto you? They said, Barab'bas.

22 Pilate saith unto them, What shall I do then with Jesus which is called Christ? They all say unto him, Let him be crucified.

23 And the governor said, Why, what evil hath he done? But they cried out the more, saying, Let him be crucified.

24 ¶ When Pilate saw that he could prevail nothing, but that rather a tumult was made, he took water, and washed his hands before the multitude, saying, I am innocent of the blood of this just person: see ye to it.

25 Then answered all the people, and said, His blood be on us, and on our children.

26 Then released he Barab'bas unto them: and when he had scourged Jesus, he delivered him to be crucified.

The story of Jesus being brought before Pilate that began in verses 1,2 now resumes. Matthew takes up his narrative after the Jewish leaders have brought forth three accusations: 1.) Jesus perverts the nation. 2.) He forbids Jews to pay tribute to Caesar. 3.) He claims to be king (Luke 23:2). Politically, this made him dangerous to Pilate. This was threatening to Pilate's position.

Verses 11.

Jesus has been brought to Pilate. The Jewish leaders would not enter the Praetorium, it being secular territory. Pilate came out to them and then, having heard their accusation, goes in and directly questions Jesus as to the main point of their charges, that He claims to be a king. So here Pilate asks Him if He is the king of the Jews. That the Sanhedrin had found Him guilty of blasphemy they must have considered not important enough from the Roman point of view, as deserving the death penalty. Something directly political would be more effective. Pilate must have realized the strange irony of Jewish leaders faulting one of their own as aspiring to be their king as worthy of being turned over to the Romans for persecution and ultimately execution. Pilate knew the great desire of these oppressed

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people was to have their own king and throw out the Romans. Now they were acting in Rome's favor and wanted one of their own to be killed. This was shocking to Pilate. But he had to go through the formality of asking. The answer: "You said it." This was not an evasion but an assertive agreement.

Verse 12.

Jesus did not respond to the accusations put forward by the chief priests and elders.

Verses 13,14.

Pilate questions Jesus as to this lack of response. This was extraordinary to the governor. Certainly unlike any criminal, who would quickly try to defend themselves against every single charge. The other reason is the complete contrast between the description of who Jesus was and what He had done with the manner of man that stood before him. He was described as a violent rebellious trouble-maker. Jesus was so composed, quiet, calm, and dignified.

Verse 15.

Matthew continues with the attempt by Pilate to get Jesus released by calling to mind a custom to release a prisoner as part of the Passover celebration.

Verses 16,17.

This was to be one picked out by the populace - Pilate gives them the choice of Jesus or the notorious criminal named Barab'bas. Jesus who is called Christ is thus compared to this robber and rebel already condemned to death for murder (Mark 15:7; Luke 23:19).

It seems that Pilate hoped and expected the crowd to choose Jesus to be released when considering the manifold guilt of Barab'bas. He also mentions that Jesus is called their Messiah (Greek: Christ). He wanted to see if the general populace could overrule the religious leaders.

Verse 18.

He knew that they had handed Jesus over to him because of envy. He was about to ask the question of verse 17 again when there was a sudden interruption.

Verses 19,20.

At the judicial bench, he receives a message from his wife telling him to have nothing to do with this righteous man. She has had a disturbing dream about Him. During this interval the chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowds to ask for Barab'bas and have Jesus executed.

The wife identifies the subject of her dream as that

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righteous man. This action on her part to actually interrupt her husband at this point in his public office shows desperation. She was obviously upset and fearful for her husband in dealing with Jesus. No further details are recorded. Some consider this a divinely revealed warning for Pilate. He could not officially avoid dealing with Jesus, though he tried repeatedly to by pronouncing Him "not guilty".

Verse 21.

The question is repeated, but to Pilate's surprise they all say Barab'bas.

Verse 22.

Pilate was now desperate. What was he to do with Jesus, again "who is called Christ." Jesus had not been found guilty by him. By law he should have pronounced Jesus not guilty and released him. The possibility of a riot must have seemed imminent if he did not acquiesce to this assembled crowd. Pilate reinforced the contrast between Jesus and Barab'bas again by stating Jesus as Christ (or Savior). Under the pressure and vocal influence of the Jewish leaders, they all answered, "Let Him be crucified."

Verse 23.

Pilate again stresses the fact that there has been no proof of any wrongdoing - nothing evil, nothing criminal. The crowd ignored such please and only screamed the louder, "Let Him be crucified." This was like a frenzied chant, over and over the same words.

Verse 24.

Because of the threat of a riot by the frenzied mob, he felt forced to give in or, if a riot broke out, he would be held responsible by Rome and his job would be given to another. He took water and publicly washed his hands in front of the crowd, saying, "I am innocent of the blood of this just person: see ye to it." This was not true in actuality since he was to acquiesce to the crowd's cry and order his soldiers to scourge Jesus and then crucify Him. He shows the Jews that they are the truly guilty ones.

Verse 25.

This records the entire crowd's reply that "His blood be on us, and on our children." Without realizing it at the time, that generation cursed themselves and their children for rejecting their Messiah.

Verse 26.

Other details of these steps are recorded by John 19:1-12, which climaxes in the crowd claiming to have no king but Caesar. Matthew gives a brief recitation of Pilate's final action. He

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released Barab'bas, and had Jesus flogged and handed Him over to be crucified.

After the flogging, Jesus was so injured that a man (Simon of Cyrene) was compelled to finish carrying Jesus' cross. (Isaiah 53:5.)

Next, the Mockery.

Lesson XLIV

Matthew 27:27-44. The Mockery and Crucifixion.

27 ¶ Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the common hall, and gathered unto him the whole band of soldiers.

28 And they stripped him, and put on him a scarlet robe.

29 And when they had platted a crown of thorns, they put it upon his head, and a reed in his right hand: and they bowed the knee before him, and mocked him, saying, Hail, King of the Jews!

30 And they spit upon him, and took the reed, and smote him on the head.

31 And after that they had mocked him, they took the robe off from him, and put his own raiment on him, and led him away to crucify him.

32 ¶ And as they came out, they found a man of Cyre'ne, Simon by name: him they compelled to bear his cross.

33 And when they were come unto a place called Gol'gotha, that is to say, a place of a skull,

34 they gave him vinegar to drink mingled with gall: and when he had tasted thereof, he would not drink.

35 And they crucified him, and parted his garments, casting lots: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, They parted my garments among them, and upon my vesture did they cast lots.

36 And sitting down they watched him there;

37 and set up over his head his accusation written, THIS IS JESUS THE KING OF THE JEWS.

38 Then were there two thieves crucified with him; one on the right hand, and another on the left.

39 And they that passed by reviled him, wagging their heads,

40 and saying, Thou that destroyest the temple, and buildest it in three days, save thyself. If thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross.

41 Likewise also the chief priests mocking him, with the scribes and elders, said,

42 He saved others; himself he cannot save. If he be the King of Israel, let him now come down from the cross, and we will believe him.

43 He trusted in God; let him deliver him now, if he will have him: for he said, I am the Son of God.

44 The thieves also, which were crucified with him, cast the same in his teeth.

The Mockery.

Before Jesus was led away, there was an interval of time when the Roman soldiers indulged their own brand of cruelty.

Verse 27.

These soldiers were in service of the Roman government, but

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most likely from Syria. They would be fluent in Aramaic, also spoken by Jews, and familiar with Jewish customs. Apparently during the time the Centurion and his 4 soldiers were preparing for the crucifixion, the other soldiers present decide to have some sport. There is no mention of how many times this would have been. It is possible those soldiers that had taken part in Christ's arrest were among these. It was a common thing to make fun of condemned criminals, and in this case these soldiers would be able to show their common contempt for the Jews. Here was their "King" to make fun of.

Verses 28-30.

First, they stripped Him and threw a scarlet robe around Him (the royal color). Someone had woven a crown of thorns and placed it on His head. Thorns are first mentioned after Adam's fall as part of the curse (Genesis 3:18). Jesus now bears the sign of the curse as His death is to deliver both us and nature finally from its penalty. This was a fake crown that brought only excruciating pain and bleeding, but suited their purpose. They then placed a strong reed in His hand to represent a king's scepter (only Matthew mentions this). They then took turns dropping to their knees in front of Him saying in a most mocking manner, "Hail, king of the Jews." As they rise up, each then spits in His face, the ultimate form of spite. They also take the stick that represented His scepter and hit Him on the head, continually driving the thorns into His flesh. A king with no power, not even to defend Himself. John mentions that they also slapped Him (John 19:3).

John also records the final scene where Pilate brings Jesus out in front of the crowd, still in the robe and crown of thorns, also having been scourged. It must have been a bloody sight. Pilate says, "Behold! The man!" He obviously wants the crowd to have pity on Jesus' condition, His having been brutalized. No such outcome. They continue to cry to crucify Him. While Pilate was still trying to release Jesus, the crowd calls out the ultimate threat - they have no king but Caesar. Therefore if he releases this "king", he is no friend of the emperor. He knows these people would not hesitate to so accuse him and insure his removal from office, or worse, his own execution as a result. So he sits down on the judgment seat of the Stone Pavement called Gabbatha and pronounces the sentence of death on Jesus. Jesus' own clothes are placed on Him again and He is led away to be crucified.

Verse 32.

By custom and law the condemned were required to bear their own cross to the place of execution outside of the city. It is assumed (no record to the contrary) that this included the whole cross, not just the cross-beam. The title was posted above the head on the vertical post. That Jesus was physically unable to carry His

Lesson XLIV Continued

cross for very long certainly emphasizes the extent of His series of injuries. As He was giving way under this load, the soldiers used their authority to requisition help from the public. In this moment, Simon, a man from Cyrene - in Libya - was coming toward them. He was a Jew visiting Jerusalem for the Passover. This was a custom of Jews from this area, there even being a Cyrenian synagogue in the city (Acts 6:9).

It appears that he later lived in Rome with his wife and two sons: Alexander and Rufus (Romans 16:13). That this family is later mentioned as Christians make it obvious that Simon's experience with Jesus here and at the crucifixion led him to faith in Christ.

Verses 33-38. The Legionaries.

The place of execution was called Golgotha - that is, the Place of the Skull. Apparently it was an outcropping of rock that resembled a skull. The crucifixions are on the top. This was alongside the main road that led westward from the city.

At some point, after Christ was suspended on the cross, Christ was offered wine mixed with myrrh (bitter). This was to dull the senses and lessen the pain. Having tasted it, Jesus refused to drink, not choosing to dull His senses.

Matthew does not give a detailed account of the steps of the actual crucifixion: the nails through hands (or wrists) and feet. He only records that these things were carried out: having crucified Him. His emphasis was on His giving up His life, body and soul, for the sins of others.

Another tradition of the soldiers, to divide the last possessions of the condemned among themselves. This was done by casting lots - most likely by throwing dice. This would include sandals, belt, tunic, and outer garment. This was woven in one piece. This fulfills the prophecy in Psalms 22:18. John 19:23 refers to this fulfillment directly. The soldiers remain, now sitting down and watching over the scene, so there would be no interference with the execution.

The following description of the placard placed above Jesus' head must not be assumed to have happened after the previously described actions of the soldiers. Though out of chronology, Matthew wishes to record this statement of the indictment which Jesus was being executed for. The words of most importance were: 'This is Jesus The King of the Jews'. This is also called a superscription in Mark 15:26 and Luke 23:38. Pilate had told what was to be written (John 19:22) in Aramaic, Latin, and Greek, and that he refused to change it to "he claimeth to be" at the request of the Jewish leaders.

During the time of Jesus' crucifixion, two convicted criminals, one on each side, were also crucified. In this circumstance, Jesus was also considered a criminal, being executed between two condemned robbers (or, revolutionaries).

Lesson XLIV Continued

Verses 39,40.

Those that passed by were not among those that purposely went to Calvary to observe the crucifixion. These people were just passing by on the nearby road to Jerusalem. Obviously much had been spread abroad of the recent events concerning the activities of Jesus, and the ensuing trials and accusations. These people stopped only long enough to observe the scene and offer their disdain, their rude and cruel mockery, and irreverence, actually shouting blasphemies against the Son of God. They have picked up the misquote: the accusation of Jesus, threatening to destroy the Temple and rebuild it in three days. They mock Him by telling Him to come down from the cross if He is the Son of God. They reject every part of His life, His miracles, His testimony about Himself, and the Truth of God in Him.

Verses 41-43.

The role of the chief priests, the scribes, and elders. They mock Him saying that He had saved others but He cannot save Himself. They claim that He claims to be the king of Israel, but they will only believe if He comes down from the cross. If He is the Son of God, then God should now deliver Him to prove it. If He placed His trust in God then God should deliver Him. Whatever semblance of proper behavior was now put aside and these men ridicule the One they once feared and envied. To them, that Jesus remained on the cross proved His weakness. Therefore, He could not be the Son of God. Luke describes them as turning up their noses at Him, sneering (Luke 23:35).

As if saying "What kind of king is this man?" At no point in His ministry did He accept or in any way say that He came to overthrow the Romans. He had agreed that He was the Son of God - they had to accept the reality of His miracles though they attempted to give Satan the credit. Here, they do not mock Him directly, but talk about Him to each other. This actually demonstrated their inner cowardice. They suggest that if He was the Son of God, God now has no further interest in Him, that His trust in God is without purpose. Otherwise, God would deliver Him from suffering and death. According to their reasoning, this made His claim of being God's Son a lie.

Verse 44.

Scripture agrees that at first the two robbers picked up what they heard the others shouting at Jesus. They reviled Him in the same way, saying that if He is really the Christ, He must save Himself and them to prove it. (Luke 23:39.)

I Peter 2:23,24 puts it powerfully: "who while being reviled, did not revile in return; while suffering, never threatened, but continued to entrust Himself to Him Who judges righteously; Who Himself bore our own sins in His body on the cross, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed."

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The repentance of one of the robbers is recorded in Luke 23:39-43. Jesus had previously said, in Luke 23:24, "Father forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing."

Matthew 27:45-56. Jesus Dies on the Cross.

45 ¶ Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land unto the ninth hour.

46 And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eli, Eli, lama sabach'thani? that is to say, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?

47 Some of them that stood there, when they heard that, said, This man calleth for Eli'jah.

48 And straightway one of them ran, and took a sponge, and filled it with vinegar, and put it on a reed, and gave him to drink.

49 The rest said, Let be, let us see whether Eli'jah will come to save him.

50 Jesus, when he had cried again with a loud voice, yielded up the ghost.

51 ¶ And, behold, the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom; and the earth did quake, and the rocks rent;

52 and the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints which slept arose,

53 and came out of the graves after his resurrection, and went into the holy city, and appeared unto many.

54 Now when the centurion, and they that were with him, watching Jesus, saw the earthquake, and those things that were done, they feared greatly, saying, Truly this was the Son of God.

55 ¶ And many women were there beholding afar off, which followed Jesus from Galilee, ministering unto him:

56 among which was Mary Mag'dalene, and Mary the mother of James and Joses, and the mother of Zeb'edee's children.

The sixth hour would be our noon, the ninth hour therefore 3:00 P.M.

At noon there was a sudden and intense darkness. It was extensive: "over all the land." There is no explanation as to how it happened. It could only be a special occurrence brought about by God. No natural eclipse would last for 3 hours. The meaning has to do with the judgment of God upon our sins. This was also the time of Christ, our Substitute, suffering the worst agony, isolation, and rejection.

Verse 46.

Finally at about 3 in the afternoon, Jesus uttered words that show what He has experienced: "My God, my God, why has thou forsaken me?" These are the first words of Christ from the cross recorded by both Matthew and Mark.

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Jesus still called out "my God," though He felt the first absence of any answer. Thus the agony of God forsaking Him.

Verses 47-49.

The Hebrew Eli follows the Greek, while the remaining words are Aramaic, correctly translated in the second half of the verse (a direct quote of the opening verse of Psalm 22). Some of those who heard Him cry out misunderstood, thinking He called out Elijah, or Eliya in Hebrew.

One among them felt some sympathy, took a sponge, filled it with sour wine, put it on a stick and gave Him to drink. The rest continued in their mockery, saying "Wait and see if Elijah comes to rescue Him."

John 19:28 records the fifth cross utterance, "I am thirsty." It has been assumed that it was a soldier that filled the sponge with the cheap wine, likened to vinegar, that soldiers commonly drank. It was good to quench thirst. This was offered to Jesus on a stick.

Verse 50.

And Jesus, having again cried out with a loud voice, yielded up His spirit. He died voluntarily, gave His life, poured it out, laid it down (Isaiah 53:12; John 10:11,15). "It is finished," (John 19:30). He had completed the task the Father had given Him to do. The last words recorded from the cross are, "Father, into Thy hands I commend my spirit," (Luke 23:46) again in communion with the Father, entrusting Him with His Spirit. This was united with His glorified body on the morning of the resurrection.

Verses 51-53.

True signs mentioned here: the curtain that separated the Holy of Holies (where the Mercy Seat was) from the Holy Place (the place of public worship) was torn in two, from top to bottom. This was a miracle from God. It was not natural for a curtain to be torn from the top, from wear. It occurred at the precise time of Christ's death.

Hebrews 10:19,20 explains this as symbolic as showing the opening into the presence of God through the death of Jesus for all believers in Him. Also there was an earthquake, rocks were split, and tombs were opened. Another sign from God of the seriousness and importance of Christ's unique sacrifice.

Many bodies of saints, who had fallen asleep, were raised, leaving their tombs. After His resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many. Apparently these saints were glorified, not resurrected, bodies. They did not enter Jerusalem and appear to many until after Jesus' resurrection. It also appears that after their appearance the first-fruits among whom Christ was the first. There is no indication of exactly when their ascension took place.

Lesson XLIV Continued

Verse 54.

The earthquake, plus all the other things that were happening around Jesus' death, caused the centurion and his men to be frightened. The events were so dramatic and unusual that they surmised that the only explanation was that this was God's Son. Otherwise there was no natural or normal way to explain these events. The darkness, earthquake, rocks splitting, tombs opened. They had heard the Jewish leaders mock Jesus as Son of God. Luke records that the centurion glorified God and said "Certainly, this was a righteous man."

Luke also mentions that the crowd in general finally was deeply affected (23:48) and were "smiting their breasts".

Verses 55,56.

Watching from a distance were many women who had been ministering to His needs. They had followed Him from Galilee. Among them were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Joses, and the mother of the sons of Zeb'edee. John records their being near the cross at one point (19:25). John also includes Jesus' mother who he was told to take to his home (John 19:27). The other three here mentioned are also mentioned by Mark 15:40. They were present at the burial.

Of the disciples, only John was present at Calvary. However, several of Christ's women supporters were there, who had showed care and support of His needs. They were thus important witnesses of His death, and later, of His resurrection to the beginning church and to all who subsequently have believed.

Lesson XLV

Matthew 27:57-66. The Burial.

57 ¶ When the even was come, there came a rich man of Arimathea, named Joseph, who also himself was Jesus' disciple:
58 he went to Pilate, and begged the body of Jesus. Then Pilate commanded the body to be delivered.
59 And when Joseph had taken the body, he wrapped it in a clean linen cloth,
60 and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn out in the rock: and he rolled a great stone to the door of the sepulchre, and departed.
61 And there was Mary Magdalene, and the other Mary, sitting over against the sepulchre.
62 ¶ Now the next day, that followed the day of the preparation, the chief priests and Pharisees came together unto Pilate,
63 saying, Sir, we remember that that deceiver said, while he was yet alive, After three days I will rise again.
64 Command therefore that the sepulchre be made sure until the third day, lest his disciples come by night, and steal him away, and say unto the people, He is risen from the dead: so the last error shall be worse than the first.
65 Pilate said unto them, Ye have a watch: go your way, make it as sure as ye can.
66 So they went, and made the sepulchre sure, sealing the stone, and setting a watch.

As before stated, Jesus died at three o'clock in the afternoon. According to Deuteronomy 21:23 it was unlawful to leave a dead body on a tree overnight. This would be doubly wrong as this was to happen on a Sabbath. Plus this was the Sabbath of the Passover week (John 19:31). It was also the necessary custom to bury the body soon after death. Therefore it was important that Jesus be taken care of before 6 P.M.

The disciples had fled. Though John had returned after taking Mary (the mother of Jesus) to his home, he had not made any arrangements to bury Jesus' body.

Joseph of Arimathea abruptly enters the narrative. He was wealthy. He comes forward to provide a tomb for Jesus (Isaiah 53:9). He was a member of good standing of the Sanhedrin (Luke 23:51; Mark 15:43), but had not consented to the verdict pronounced by that group against Jesus. He had secretly been a believer in Jesus (John 19:38). He may have been afraid to acknowledge this openly for fear of being removed from the Sanhedrin or from the local synagogue. According to Mark 15:43, he was bold enough now to ask the Roman governor for the body of Jesus. Pilate had been assured by the centurion that Jesus was dead (Mark 15:44); he gave Joseph permission. He returned to Calvary to take possession of the body.

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Verses 59,60.

Once there, he took the body, wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn out of the rock. A big stone was rolled to close the entrance and he left.

Verse 61.

Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were there, sitting across from the tomb observing all that was done. They saw the body placed in the unused (new) tomb, and the stone rolled in front of the entrance.

Verse 62.

The day of preparation was Friday, the day before the Sabbath. In spite of their strict Sabbath observance, both the chief priests and Pharisees, they find it more important to go to Pilate, entering the secular Gentile judging place called the Pratorium. They had fear that something Jesus promised would at least appear to take place.

Verse 63.

They expressed to Pilate that Jesus, the impostor, said that He would arise after three days.

Verse 64.

This led to this move. They considered it possible that His disciples would steal the body and then tell the people that He was raised from the dead, resulting in a deception worse than the first. They therefore request that the grave be made secure by Roman guards until the time passed. They greatly misjudge the disciples who were scattered in fear for their own lives. They also misjudge their own ability to guard the tomb with their own police. They also did not even conceive of the possibility that God would bring to pass what Christ predicted. They feared that if Christ's body was removed and the rumor spread, then even more people would believe in this miraculous fallacy, than in the signs, miracles, and words of Jesus while alive. They were as devious in their own minds, as they thought the disciples would be.

Verse 65.

Pilate responded by giving them a guard and ordering them to make it as secure as they know how. Though he had previously not agreed to change the superscription over Jesus' head on the cross, he here readily agreed to assign them a guard for the required time they requested. To him this was a trivial and possibly superstitious matter, easily met.

Verse 66.

Pleased with themselves by the granting of their request, the chief Priests and Pharisees now make certain their request is fulfilled in every particular. They must witness the guard posted at

Lesson XLV Continued

Joseph's Tomb. They are to see that there is no interference. A seal of either clay or wax applied to a cord with an official seal was impressed into the malleable material to prove that the stone covering of the tomb was not disturbed. This was done in the guards' presence. What had been intended to keep men from interfering with the tomb only would prove that God was acting in the resurrection of His Son, and no human action was involved. It would be the men the Jewish leaders requested to guard the place that would be the first to report the miraculous succeeding events at Joseph's Tomb.

Matthew 28:1-10. The Resurrection.

1 In the end of the sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week, came Mary Mag'dalene and the other Mary to see the sepulchre.

2 And, behold, there was a great earthquake: for the angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat upon it.

3 His countenance was like lightning, and his raiment white as snow: 4 and for fear of him the keepers did shake, and became as dead men. 5 And the angel answered and said unto the women, Fear not ye: for I know that ye seek Jesus, which was crucified.

6 He is not here: for he is risen, as he said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay.

7 And go quickly, and tell his disciples that he is risen from the dead; and, behold, he goeth before you into Galilee; there shall ye see him: lo, I have told you.

8 And they departed quickly from the sepulchre with fear and great joy; and did run to bring his disciples word.

9 And as they went to tell his disciples, behold, Jesus met them, saying, All hail. And they came and held him by the feet, and worshipped him.

10 Then said Jesus unto them, Be not afraid: go tell my brethren that they go into Galilee, and there shall they see me.

Verse 1.

Now after the Sabbath, at dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to look at the tomb. Mark adds Salome (16:1). Luke adds Joanna, indicating also others (24:10). Apparently there was a group of women that went to the tomb. They set out from the city while it was still dark, and arrived after sunrise.

Matthew mentions that they came to look at the tomb. The women had observed that Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus had only quickly wrapped Jesus' body with linen and a mixture of myrrh and aloes. The women wanted to properly anoint and cover the body as was the custom. They had brought the necessities on this morning, the first opportunity after the Sabbath. Mark mentions their concern about who would roll away the heavy stone covering the entrance.

Lesson XLV Continued

These women may be faulted, as well as the disciples, for not actually believing Christ's prediction about being raised the third day. They, however, do show courage and loving concern for Jesus' body. They were at the cross, now at the tomb.

As they came near, they saw that the stone had already been rolled away.

Verse 2.

Matthew now records an earthquake. An angel of the Lord - arriving from heaven - stepped forward and rolled away the stone, then sat upon it. The women saw only the result. The stone was moved so that the women and later Peter and John could enter the tomb and see that it was empty.

Verse 3.

His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. This was proof of his holiness and origin.

Verse 4.

That this happened while the guard was still there at this time is here continued. For fear of this angel's appearance, the guards shook and became as dead men. The earthquake made the earth and these men quake, the men becoming unconscious. Only some of them later dared to go into the city to report what they had observed, and experienced.

Verses 5,6.

Returning to the women. The angel addressed them with a loving reminder: "Fear not ye: for I know that ye seek Jesus, which was crucified. He is not here: for he is risen, as he said." There may have been two angels present, as Luke and John report. The angel who speaks tells them that they have no need to weep but must rejoice. To cement their faith in the fact of His resurrection, the angel adds that they should come and see the place where He lay. They are to observe the empty tomb and the linen bandages left there, and the cloth that covered His head folded in a place by itself John 20:7).

Verse 7.

Then the angel gives the women directions to go quickly and tell the disciples about the resurrection of their Savior. He is to go ahead of them into Galilee. They are to meet Him there. The disciples must be informed that Christ's prediction had been fulfilled, that He would be raised, and that He would precede them into Galilee (Matthew 26:32). The angel closes his message with "lo, I have told you." Mark 16:7 specifically directs them to tell the disciples and Peter.

Lesson XLV Continued

Verse 8.

Fear from the sight of the angel, his bright countenance, the earthquake, the joy at hearing the news of Christ's resurrection, all certainly the greatest news - the conquering of death. Their joy was great so that they ran to bring the report to the disciples. Luke records that their report was not believed (Luke 24:10,11).

Verse 9.

On their way Jesus suddenly appeared before them and said, "All hail", a quite normal and common greeting, as if nothing miraculous had occurred. They recognized Jesus, took hold of His feet and worshipped Him. He was real enough for them to touch. He appeared to them most likely because they were the first to come looking for Him, to do service to Him.

Verse 10.

He has a message for them, of the same import as that of the angel: "Be not afraid: go tell my brethren that they go into Galilee, and there shall they see me." He uplifted the disciples position to that of "My brothers" rather than those that ran away. He acknowledged them as part of His divine family, that were to share His inheritance. They were those that he dearly loved.

Matthew 28:11-20. Guards Bribed; The Great Commission; The Promised Comfortor.

11 ¶ Now when they were going, behold, some of the watch came into the city, and showed unto the chief priests all the things that were done.

12 And when they were assembled with the elders, and had taken counsel, they gave large money unto the soldiers,

13 saying, Say ye, His disciples came by night, and stole him away while we slept.

14 And if this come to the governor's ears, we will persuade him, and secure you.

15 So they took the money, and did as they were taught: and this saying is commonly reported among the Jews until this day.

16 ¶ Then the eleven disciples went away into Galilee, into a mountain where Jesus had appointed them.

17 And when they saw him, they worshipped him: but some doubted.

18 And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth.

19 Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost:

20 teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen.

Lesson XLV Continued

Verse 11.

While the women returned to the city, Matthew takes up the ending to the experience of the guards. Some of them came back to the city to report to the chief priests all that had taken place at the tomb. Only Matthew reported this. The guards had been scattered. Some had courage enough to go back and report to those whose authority they, as Roman soldiers, had been placed under, the chief priests. They recounted the blinding angelic light, the earthquake, the movement of the stone, the breaking of the seal.

Verses 12-14.

Quickly, a meeting was called to deal with this unexpected occurrence. The chief priests called together the elders to make a decision as to how to deal with this report. Their report must never be repeated to anyone. The soldiers were bribed with a large sum of money to guarantee their going along with the lie. There must not be any word of resurrection. They must repeat the lie that the disciples of Jesus had come during the night, while the guards had been sleeping, and had stolen Jesus' body.

They were promised protection if Pilate heard of this and wanted to punish these soldiers for their dereliction of duty. They would prevent them from getting into any trouble. Whether any believed the soldiers' report we are not told, but they all agreed that it would only have disastrous consequences if the general public heard about even the possibility. So the generation of the false story they felt was essential to put the people off track from the truth.

Verse 15.

The soldiers took the money and did as they had been told. Though it was dereliction of duty to fall asleep on duty, they thought it their best course to accept the money, and the protection of the Sanhedrin against any recourse by Pilate.

The false story was widely spread among the Jews, to the very day Matthew wrote his Gospel. The Jews wanted the world to believe that the disciples had stolen the body of Jesus by night. Some, even today, still accept this lie.

This is a major flaw in the story, however. How gullible could people be to believe that 12 Roman soldiers would be asleep on duty? Then that a handful of disciples could come and roll the stone aside so quietly as not to alarm anyone. They could not even be aroused by these men going in and carrying out the corpse and getting away. The final obvious question, if all of them were sleeping, how did they know what happened? They already admitted they could not see or hear what happened, so they must be just making it up. The obviousness of the lie should also make the truth more obvious.

Lesson XLV Continued

Verse 16.

Matthew now records that Jesus had given directions for the eleven disciples to meet Him in Galilee at a particular mountain. This is not recorded anywhere as when this specific mountain was mentioned. At any rate it was a secluded spot, yet near the familiar area near their homes.

It is possible that this appearance coincides with or is part of His appearance to the 500 brothers mentioned by Paul in I Corinthians 15:6. What takes place here closes Matthew's Gospel. For the account of the ascension from the Mount of Olives near Jerusalem one must turn to Luke 24:50,51 and Acts 1:4-11.

Verse 17.

When He appeared they saw and worshipped. But some doubted (as mentioned in Luke 24:10,11). Apparently He appeared at some distance from them at first and some were unsure.

Verse 18.

Then Jesus came nearer and spoke to them. This would make recognition certain; they could see Him clearly and recognize His voice. His words state that He has been given all authority in heaven and earth (Daniel 7:14). This is the result and reward of His mediatorial work, His resurrection, the triumph over death. This was to include His coming role of judge over the fate of all men. That He has this power and authority must encourage His followers to be bold in proclaiming His Message of Salvation.

Verses 19,20.

The Great Commission. So Jesus proclaims to them to "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost". They must also teach them how to speak and act according to all that He had commanded them.

In God's plan it was to the Jew first (from Jerusalem) then to spread out to all nations. This was the time to begin. Today it is still the responsibility of each believer to "go" and share their faith and bring others into the fold.

This was Christ's direction. He promised His strength and help, and because He is the only and greatest hope for mankind, the only way of salvation, and therefore He is worthy of all faith, trust, and obedience.

The command includes making those that accept the Gospel into disciples. This goes beyond conversion. This includes learning, growing, and maturing in their faith. This must affect the heart, mind, and will - and be practiced.

According to Paul, in the Old Testament, circumcision was a sign and seal of the righteousness of Christ accepted by faith

Lesson XLV Continued

(Romans 4:11). In the New Testament, baptism was the replacement as a sign and seal of the righteousness of Christ accepted by faith (Colossians 2:11,12). It is the sign and seal that they are adopted as child and heir of the Father; they are cleansed by the blood sacrifice of the Son of God, and they are indwelt by the Holy Spirit and guided unto sanctification by Him. It is also the public action that proclaims that person's death to the world and its sin unto new life as a forgiven sinner through Christ, therefore a member of His Church.

"...teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you..."

The early church required that before a person was admitted to church membership, they must give evidence of repentance and basic knowledge of Christian principles. After baptism and church membership then the church was responsible to teach them all of the wonderful words of Christ concerning Christian knowledge, belief, and action. This included commands such as love the brethren, love they neighbor as thyself, proclaiming the Gospel, prayer, humility, a forgiving spirit, and so on.

Matthew closes his Gospel with Christ's promise that they are to emphatically keep in mind the following: "I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen." The great "I am" is the one making this promise that can therefore be counted upon as certain, accomplished fact. That Jesus guarantees His own personal help and watchful guidance, also gives great encouragement and guarantees constant and continual help each day until the Church Age closes. This will happen at the Rapture of the Church which is imminent and closer than ever before. Maranatha! Amen!

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We would all like to thank God for His Word and His small, still voice in the lonely hours.